

Cook'sCountry



JANUARY 2016



The Swiss Haus Bakery in Philadelphia has long been famous for its fluffy, delicate hazelnut cake. The recipe is a secret, but after a few weeks in the test kitchen, we created a rich, tender version you can make at home. PAGE 8

Hazelnut Cake

Prime Rib with
Roast Potatoes

Holiday Cookies

Almond Boneless Chicken

Simple, Crisp, Flavorful

Stuffed Acorn Squash

Wedges Are the Answer

Spicy Cheese Bread

Wisconsin Favorite Perfected

**Easy Slow-Cooker
Chicken and Rice Soup**

Small Food Processors

Are They Worth Buying?

Apple-Cinnamon Muffins

Amp Up the Apple Flavor

Pork Saltimbocca

Make Your Own Cutlets

**Cooking Class:
Herb Roast Chicken**

Crab Louis Salad

Bring Back the King of Salads

Testing Baking Powders

No, They Aren't All the Same

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Cook's Country

Dear Country Cook,

Wild turkeys are everywhere! I see them almost every time I head into the woods. I've even seen them in Boston, crossing the street slowly, almost daring a car to get in the way. They rarely give ground.

A few years back, our neighbor Jean brought over a homegrown heirloom bird for the holidays; small breasts and legs so large I had to use a hacksaw to get it into the wood cookstove. Sometimes there is good reason why an heirloom variety is just that—a thing of the past.

My favorite turkey is Heri, the heirloom bird that Jean keeps as a pet. He is one-legged after an unfortunate car accident, but he still manages to hop around. He's white and large, about the size of pot-bellied pig, if pigs had wings.

Ben Franklin wanted to make the turkey the national bird. It was "more respectable" than the eagle, which he felt had "bad moral character" since it was apt to steal dinner from the fishing hawk. As a cook, I agree that the turkey would have been a better choice—a brined and roasted eagle is a poor offering for the hungry traveler.

But even though we think of turkeys as dinner, I still like to see them in the wild, scurrying across an open pasture when they hear me coming or marching across a road in single file, the last young hen rushing to catch up in a flurry of quick steps.

An eagle is a thing of beauty; a turkey is a throwback, a prehistoric heirloom that has become a culinary centerpiece. One bird appears on our money; the other on our dinner table.

There is a moral there somewhere, but I like sliced turkey with gravy too much to figure out what it is.

Christopher Kimball
Founder and Editor, Cook's Country



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Hack Your Kitchen

Save money and time, and get better results in your kitchen with our latest book, **Kitchen Hacks: How Clever Cooks Get Things Done**. It's full of tips for how to outsmart tricky tasks and face down kitchen challenges with innovative and ingenious ideas.



America's Test Kitchen is a very real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside Boston. It is the home of Cook's Country and Cook's Illustrated magazines and the workday destination of more than three dozen test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand how and why they work and arrive at the best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to Cook's Country from America's Test Kitchen (CooksCountry.com) and America's Test Kitchen (AmericasTestKitchen.com) on public television.



Ask Cook's Country

BY MORGAN BOLLING

Sherry Substitute

Some of your recipes call for sherry. Are there any nonalcoholic ingredients I can use instead?

—Shawna Sullivan, Hickory, N.C.

Sherry is a Spanish fortified white wine, which means that the wine has liquor added. It has a distinctive caramel, earthy, often musky flavor that is typically both sweet and acidic. After a few days of experimenting in the test kitchen, we landed on a simple formula to imitate those qualities. To yield about a cup of nonalcoholic sherry substitute, combine ½ cup water, ⅓ cup apple juice, 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar, and ¼ teaspoon soy sauce (to mimic sherry's muskiness). We tested this in our Sherry-Rosemary Pan Sauce, and it tasted very close to the sauce made with sherry. When testing our "mock sherry" in our Frozen Biscuit Tortoni dessert, we found that it was best to omit the soy sauce. Feel free to make this mixture in advance, as it will hold up to 1 week in the refrigerator.

THE BOTTOM LINE: For a nonalcoholic substitute for sherry, use our combination of water, apple juice, apple cider vinegar, and soy sauce (omit the soy sauce for sweet applications).

All About Alliums

What is the difference between green onions, spring onions, and scallions? Can they be used interchangeably?

—Emily Adams, Waterbury, Vt.

In the United States, green onions and scallions are two names for the same thing. We refer to them as scallions, as this is a slightly more widely used term.

Spring onions and scallions are species of the genus *Allium*, along with garlic, shallots, chives, ramps, and leeks. Scallions never form a bulb, so their white bases do not bulge. Spring onions look like scallions with small white bulbs; they are typically harvested in spring and are usually not available year-round.

We tried them both raw, roasted with oil and salt, in a compound butter (which we tossed with potatoes), and in our Honey-Scallion Barbecue Sauce (CooksCountry.com/honeybbqsauce).

Sweet Potato Rainbow

I recently saw purple and white sweet potatoes at the market. Can I substitute these for orange sweet potatoes in my sweet potato pie?

—Marchell Scott, Winston-Salem, N.C.

While you may typically see just one or two kinds of sweet potatoes at the grocery store, there are actually hundreds of varieties. Among these, both the flesh and skin color can vary. To determine what the differences were in flavor and texture, we tasted common varieties of white and purple sweet potatoes boiled, mashed, and in sweet potato pie next to their more common orange-fleshed cousins.

Overall, the white sweet potatoes we tried tasted citrusy and floral, while the purple sweet potatoes tasted more neutral. Both, however, shared some of the sweet, pumpkin-like flavors we're used to with orange sweet potatoes. But there were more noticeable differences in texture. Both white and purple sweet potatoes have lower moisture contents and are generally starchier—actually more akin to regular white or yellow potatoes. Because of this, they cooked differently. The mashed sweet potatoes made with white or purple sweet potatoes were thicker and needed to be thinned significantly with stock or cream to reach the texture of the mashed orange sweet potatoes. In the pie, both were denser than the control batch. And while the purple sweet potato pie was visually very interesting, tasters commented that it seemed "starchy" or even "gluey" or "mealy."

THE BOTTOM LINE: White and purple sweet potatoes have their own unique texture and flavor and so are worth trying. But do not substitute them for orange sweet potatoes in recipes because they are starchier, contain less water, and will cook differently.



ORANGE
SWEET POTATOES
Fluffy, perfect pie.

WHITE
SWEET POTATOES
Dense and starchy pie.

PURPLE
SWEET POTATOES
Cool look, but also too dense.

They both tasted very similar. Tasters called both of them "strong and oniony," with the scallions being slightly more pungent and reminiscent of raw onion than the spring onions. The spring onions, however, fared the best in our roasting tests because of their sweetness and slightly larger size.

You can use spring onions and scallions interchangeably in raw applications where they are chopped. But be careful about using them in cooked applications, as the smaller size of scallions may affect cooking times.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Scallions and green onions are the same vegetable. In raw applications we found spring onions to be an acceptable substitute for scallions and vice versa.

Preshredded Cheese

I have better results with preshredded store-bought Parmesan than with freshly grated cheese when coating food for baking or frying. Why?

—Amy Grohman, St. Paul, Minn.

Most of the test kitchen's recipes that call for Parmesan cheese call for freshly grated. But your question intrigued us. We made our Parmesan-Crusted Asparagus (CooksCountry.com/parmasparagus) and our Crisp Parmesan Pork Cutlets (CooksCountry.com/parmporkcutlets) with both freshly grated Parmesan and store-bought preshredded Parmesan to see if we noticed a difference. In both tests, preshredded Parmesan produced a crispier coating.

Our science editor explained that

because pieces of preshredded cheese are exposed to air for a much longer time than freshly grated cheese is, the preshredded cheese loses more moisture to evaporation. The decreased moisture content leads to crispier, drier coatings.

What about the flavor? We still preferred the taste of the freshly grated cheese in both applications. But if you want to take a shortcut, or you are more focused on the crispiness, go ahead and use preshredded in frying and breading applications. Sargento won our recent taste test of preshredded Parmesans.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Preshredded Parmesan cheese yields crispier coatings than freshly grated because of its larger surface area and lower moisture content.

Walnut Oil 101

Someone gave me a bottle of unrefined walnut oil for Christmas, but I have no idea what to do with it. Can I use it as I would olive oil?

—Alex Fox, Sacramento, Calif.

Most nut oils (like walnut, hazelnut, and almond) are available in refined and unrefined versions. To answer your question, we tasted both refined and unrefined walnut oils against extra-virgin olive oil in our recipes for Basic Vinaigrette (CooksCountry.com/vinaigrette), Garlicky Croutons (CooksCountry.com/croutons), and Classic Hummus (CooksCountry.com/hummus), as well as plain. To see how it would fare in cooked applications, we also tasted plain oil that had been heated to 350 degrees and then cooled.

We found the refined walnut oil to be neutral-tasting and not very interesting in all applications. The unrefined walnut oil, however, has a strong taste of roasted walnuts when tasted raw (it was especially fantastic in the vinaigrette). When heated, it loses much of its flavor—therefore, cooking with unrefined walnut oil is a waste of relatively expensive oil.

We repeated these tests with refined and unrefined hazelnut and almond oils and had similar results.

THE BOTTOM LINE: We suggest saving unrefined nut oils for raw applications, as heat destroys much of their flavor. Most nut oils, especially the unrefined versions, can go rancid quickly; store them in the refrigerator, and use them within a few months of purchase.



ONION COUSINS

Scallions, aka green onions (left), are slender. Spring onions have a small bulb.

To ask us a cooking question, visit CooksCountry.com/ask. Or write to Ask Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Just try to stump us!

Kitchen Shortcuts

COMPILED BY DIANE UNGER



FOILED AGAIN

Flatter Bacon

Tyler Swenson, Owensboro, Ky.

Years ago, someone gave me a small 6-inch cast-iron skillet as a gift. It was cute, but I had no idea what to use it for. It hit me one day when I was frying bacon in my big cast-iron pan: I wrapped the smaller pan in foil and used it as a bacon press. Now the goofy gift is actually useful.



NUTTY TIP

Freeze for Ease

Sarah Roland, Oak Park, Ill.

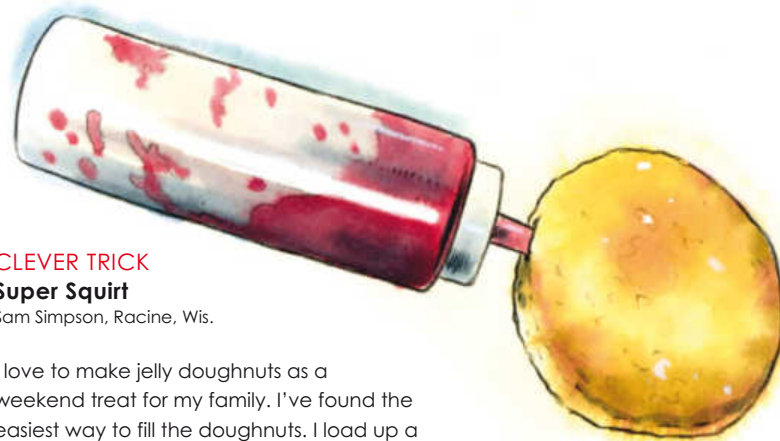
I have a recipe for Brazil nut cookies that I make every Christmas, and every year I wrestled with shelling the hard-to-crack nuts. I then found that the shells of the nuts come off much more easily—and their meat is much easier to extract—if I freeze them first. Just a few hours of freezer time saves me a lot of extra work.

TIMESAVER

Seasoned Flour, Anytime

Kate Foley, Jefferson City, Mo.

I frequently dredge chicken or pork in a deeply seasoned flour mixture before frying. To make my life easier, I mix up a big batch of flour seasoned with salt, black pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, and paprika and keep it in the pantry. It saves me a lot of time when I need to get dinner on the table fast.



CLEVER TRICK

Super Squirt

Sam Simpson, Racine, Wis.

I love to make jelly doughnuts as a weekend treat for my family. I've found the easiest way to fill the doughnuts. I load up a squeeze bottle with the jelly, insert the tip into the side of each doughnut, and squeeze.

COOL TIP

Frost No More

Marilyn Clapsaddle, Chapel Hill, N.C.

To prevent freezer burn on things like meat sauce and chili that I freeze in pint containers, I first put them in the freezer for 1 hour. I then press plastic wrap down onto the food, then cover and freeze. This eliminates the frosty top that can give foods a nasty flavor.



COOL IDEA

Cold and Creamy

Brenda Gorman, Salt Lake City, Utah

My kids love hot cereal in the morning. To keep these impatient eaters from burning their tongues, I use an ice cube tray to freeze low-fat milk (with a drop of vanilla extract for flavor) and then stir two cubes into the hot cereal. This cools it down quickly and adds a bit of creaminess. I often drop a cube into my morning tea, too.

DOUBLE DUTY

Squash Scoop

Kathy Wheeler, Saco, Maine

I love butternut and acorn squash, but I've always made a mess when scooping out the seeds with a soup spoon. So I was excited to find a better tool for the job: a standard ice cream scoop. The sturdy scoop has a sharp edge that cuts through the fibrous seed goop with ease.



Submit a tip online at CooksCountry.com/kitchenshortcuts or send a letter to Kitchen Shortcuts, Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name, address, and phone number. If we publish your tip, you will receive a free one-year subscription to Cook's Country. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

Ultimate Prime Rib and Potatoes

We wanted potatoes with rich, beefy flavor. Would it prove to be as easy as just cooking them under the roast? BY MORGAN BOLLING

THE CULINARY FOLKLORE of boulangère potatoes is a well-spun yarn: Before French peasants had home ovens, they would bring their Sunday roasts, nestled on beds of potatoes, to the town bread baker (the boulangère) to cook in the residual heat of his oven. The tasty rendered fat would drip down onto the potatoes, infusing them with meaty flavor. I used this idea as inspiration for a simple but luxurious holiday meal.

Nothing beats a bone-in prime rib for a holiday centerpiece, and I knew that this cut's ample marbling (also known as fat) would render and flavor the potatoes. Following test kitchen protocol, I trimmed the roast of excess fat, made shallow crosshatch cuts in the remaining fat cap, and rubbed the roast all over with salt a full 24 hours before cooking. The long salting time gave the salt the chance to penetrate the meat, ensuring a well-seasoned, juicy roast. To serve eight to 10 people, I decided to use 4 pounds of Yukon gold potatoes, which are our favorites for roasting.

I placed the potatoes in a roasting pan, nestled a V-rack into them, and dropped the meat into the rack. We like to roast potatoes at a high temperature (425 to 475 degrees) to get crispy, brown exteriors and creamy interiors; we like to cook bone-in rib roasts slowly at a low temperature (200 to 250 degrees) for controlled, even cooking. I tried a middle ground of 350 degrees, but the potatoes were only pale and limp by the time the meat was medium-rare.

I dialed the oven back to 250 degrees. But when the roast was a perfect medium-rare, the potatoes were still hard. Cooking the meat and potatoes together was a bad idea.

But I wasn't ready to give up my dream of beefy potatoes. I cooked my next roast for just over 3 hours at the same 250 degrees. Then I removed the roast, cranked the heat to 450, tossed the potato chunks with the beef drippings, and roasted them on a rimmed baking sheet for about 40 minutes. They were crisp on the outside and fluffy within, but I wanted more flavor.

I added a little beef broth to the baking sheet, but that didn't do much for the flavor and greatly impeded browning. What about the fat I was trimming off the raw roasts at the beginning? With the next roast, I saved that



We cook the bone-in roast slowly for even cooking and then turn up the heat to cook the potatoes while the meat rests.

trimmed fat and put it under the meat as it cooked; at the end of roasting I had more intensely flavored drippings in which to toss the potato chunks, and it made the potatoes taste much more beefy. Precooking the potatoes in the microwave until they just began to release moisture made their interiors creamier. A bit of chopped fresh rosemary brought everything together.

There was just one more problem to

solve: The roast lacked exterior browning. Since the oven was on, I tried letting the roast brown in its dry heat, but the exterior overcooked by the time there was decent browning. It was better to sear the cooked roast in a little oil in a hot skillet, which did the job much faster and thus didn't overcook the meat. An easy red wine-orange sauce proved a nice, bright contrast to the savory beef and potatoes.

SHOPPING Prime Rib

Look for a prime rib roast with a ½-inch fat cap. You'll use the fat.



PRIME RIB AND POTATOES

Serves 8 to 10

Look for a roast with an untrimmed fat cap, ideally ½ inch thick. The roast must be salted and refrigerated for at least 24 hours before cooking. Wait until the roast is done cooking before peeling and cutting the potatoes so they don't discolor. It is crucial to use a sturdy rimmed baking sheet for this recipe. Our favorite is the Wear-Ever Half Size Heavy Duty Sheet Pan (13 gauge) by Vollrath. Serve with Red Wine-Orange Sauce, if desired.

- 1 (7-pound) first-cut beef standing rib roast (3 bones), with untrimmed fat cap
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 4 pounds Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1½-inch pieces
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1. Using sharp knife, trim roast's fat cap to even ¼-inch-thickness; reserve and refrigerate trimmings. Cut 1-inch crosshatch pattern in fat cap, being careful not to cut into meat. Rub 2 tablespoons salt over entire roast and into crosshatch. Transfer to large plate and refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 24 hours or up to 4 days.

2. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 250 degrees. Cut reserved trimmings into ½-inch pieces. Place 4 ounces (about 1 cup) of trimmings in rimmed baking sheet, then set wire rack in sheet. Season roast with pepper and place, fat side up, on wire rack.

3. Roast until meat registers 115 degrees for rare, 120 degrees for medium-rare, or 125 degrees for medium, 3 to 3½ hours. Transfer roast to carving board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 1 hour. Carefully remove wire rack and reserve beef fat in baking sheet (there should be about ½ cup; if not, supplement with vegetable oil).

4. Increase oven temperature to 450 degrees. Microwave potatoes, covered, in large bowl until they begin to release moisture and surfaces look wet, about 7 minutes. Pat potatoes dry with paper towels. Toss potatoes with rosemary, 2 teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Transfer potatoes to baking sheet and carefully toss with reserved fat (fat may be hot). Roast until tender and browned,

35 to 40 minutes, redistributing halfway through cooking. Season potatoes with salt and pepper to taste.

5. Pat roast dry with paper towels.

Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Sear all sides until browned, 6 to 8 minutes total. Transfer roast to carving board. Carve meat from bones and cut into ¾-inch-thick slices. Serve with potatoes.

RED WINE-ORANGE SAUCE

Makes about 1½ cups

Medium-bodied red wines, like Côtes du Rhône or Pinot Noir, are best for this sauce.

- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces and chilled
- 3 shallots, minced
- 1½ tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 3 cups beef broth
- 1½ cups red wine
- ⅓ cup orange juice
- 1½ tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- Salt and pepper

1. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add shallots, tomato paste, and sugar and cook, stirring frequently, until deep brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and flour and cook until garlic is fragrant and vegetables are well coated with flour, about 30 seconds.

2. Stir in broth, wine, orange juice, Worcestershire, and thyme, scraping up any browned bits. Bring to boil, reduce heat to medium, and cook at low boil until reduced to 2 cups, about 40 minutes.

3. Strain sauce through fine-mesh strainer set over bowl; discard solids. Return sauce to pot and place over low heat. Whisk in remaining 4 tablespoons butter, 1 piece at a time. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Strained sauce can be cooled and then refrigerated in airtight container for up to 2 days. Bring sauce to simmer before reducing heat to low and whisking in butter to finish.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Using the Fat

After trimming the roast, we use the fat to infuse big beefy flavor into the potatoes.



FIRST ROAST THE MEAT with the fat scraps in the pan.



THEN ROAST THE POTATOES in the rendered beef fat.

Sautéed Collards with Raisins and Nuts

Boiled collards taste great but don't look great. We wanted a fresh, elegant take for the holiday table. BY MORGAN BOLLING

COLLARD GREENS BOILED in the traditional Southern way take an hour to cook and, while tasty, can take on a muddy, pale hue. I wanted to dress up these humble greens for a vibrant, elegant holiday side.

I washed and dried a few bunches of collards, trimmed and discarded the stem pieces below the leaves, chopped the leaves (leaving the ribs intact), and hit the stove. I tried sautéing the chopped collards in olive oil, but it took about 40 minutes to soften the remaining stem pieces. Too long. Blanching them before sautéing helped but took two extra dishes.

For my next test, I didn't bother drying the chopped greens after washing them. I placed the wet leaves in a Dutch oven, hoping the clinging water would steam them. I covered the pot and cooked the greens for 15 minutes; I then removed the lid and stirred in plenty of extra-virgin olive oil, as well as some golden raisins and sliced almonds. The process was fast, but the collards tasted muddy. Next round, I thoroughly drained the excess liquid after the steaming stage; the flavor (and color) brightened.

For a punchy finish, I added some sliced shallot and a handful of salty grated Parmesan.

COLLARD GREENS WITH RAISINS AND ALMONDS

Serves 4 to 6

Kale can be substituted for the collard greens in this recipe.

- 2 pounds collard greens
- Salt and pepper
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup golden raisins
- 2 shallots, sliced thin
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced thin
- ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese, plus extra for serving
- ¼ cup sliced almonds, toasted
- Lemon wedges for serving

1. Trim collard stems to base of leaves; discard stems. Cut leaves into



Sweet raisins and crunchy almonds elevate humble collard greens.

1- to 2-inch pieces. Place collards in large bowl and cover with water. Swish with your hand to remove grit. Repeat with fresh water, as needed, until grit no longer appears in bottom of bowl. Drain collards in colander, but do not dry.

2. Add damp collards, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper to Dutch oven. Cover and cook over medium-high heat until tender, 14 to 17 minutes, stirring occasionally. (If pot becomes dry, add ¼ cup water so collards continue to steam.) Drain collards in colander, pressing with rubber spatula to release excess liquid. Wipe out Dutch oven with paper towels.

3. Heat ¼ cup oil in now-empty Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add raisins, shallots, garlic, and pepper flakes and cook until just beginning to brown, 2 to 4 minutes. Add collards, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook until warmed through, about 3 minutes. Off heat, stir in Parmesan. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

4. Transfer collards to platter. Drizzle with remaining 2 tablespoons oil and sprinkle with almonds. Serve with lemon wedges and extra Parmesan.

Cheesy Corn Casserole

Too many versions of this Midwestern favorite go wrong. It was time to set things right. BY MORGAN BOLLING

CHEESY CORN CASSEROLE, a common holiday side dish in the South and Midwest, falls somewhere on the spectrum between creamed corn and cornbread. Most recipes involve stirring together corn muffin mix, canned creamed corn, canned (or frozen) corn kernels, sour cream, cheese, and eggs. You just dump it into a casserole and bake.

Sound too good to be true? It is. The worst of the handful of existing recipes I tried didn't even justify this minimal effort. They ranged from goopy to greasy and from appallingly bland to unappealingly dense. I knew this dish could do with a makeover. I envisioned something substantial but light, with sweet corn and savory cheese flavors.

Prefab corn muffin mixes are good in a pinch but too sweet for this casserole. Instead, I made my own, stirring together flour, cornmeal, and baking powder—definitely worth the 2 minutes it took to put together. I also ditched the canned corn kernels and creamed corn, which rarely have any flavor and are often mushy. Instead I turned to frozen kernels. Pulsing half of them in the food processor released even more of their flavor and helped mimic the texture of creamed corn.

To these ingredients I added sour cream and a hefty dose of shredded cheddar. I stirred it all together and put it in the oven.

While the result was a substantive improvement, I found that the delicate corn was being overwhelmed by the cheddar. I tried American cheese but found the opposite problem: It was too mild. After casting about, I landed on a combination of Monterey Jack and Parmesan. Monterey Jack melts like a dream and gave me the creaminess I wanted,



Scallion whites add savory flavor to the interior of the casserole; we save the greens for the top.

while the Parmesan added deep cheese flavor without becoming overwhelming. A colleague suggested cutting some of the Monterey Jack into cubes instead

of shredding all of it to create excellent gooey cheese pockets throughout.

My casserole, though tasty, needed one more note. I gave it two: a little

cayenne for heat and some scallions (white parts processed into the corn, green parts scattered on top) for bite. “A-maize-ing,” one colleague joked. Talk about cheesy.

CHEESY CORN CASSEROLE

Serves 8 to 10

Two pounds of fresh corn kernels (from about 8 cobs) can be substituted for the frozen corn.

- 8 ounces Monterey Jack cheese
- ½ cup (2½ ounces) all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup (1⅔ ounces) cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 pounds frozen corn, thawed
- 4 scallions, white and green parts separated and sliced thin
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup)
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 13 by 9-inch baking dish. Cut 4 ounces of Monterey Jack into ½-inch cubes. Shred remaining 4 ounces of Monterey Jack on large holes of box grater; set aside. Whisk flour, cornmeal, baking powder, salt, pepper, and cayenne together in large bowl.

2. Pulse half of corn and scallion whites in food processor to coarse puree, about 10 pulses. Stir pureed corn mixture into flour mixture. Stir in sour cream, ¼ cup Parmesan, eggs, melted butter, remaining half of corn, and cubed Monterey Jack until combined. Transfer mixture to prepared baking dish. Sprinkle with shredded Monterey Jack and remaining ¼ cup Parmesan.

3. Bake until casserole is slightly puffy and cheese is golden brown, 45 to 50 minutes. Transfer casserole to wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with scallion greens and serve.

CHEESY CORN CASSEROLE WITH JALAPEÑOS AND CILANTRO

Add ¼ cup minced pickled jalapeños to batter in step 2. Sprinkle with 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro before serving.

RECIPE MAKEOVER

Revamping a Prefab Favorite

Most memories of this rib-sticking classic are of bland, stodgy versions made with supermarket corn muffin mix and cans of creamed corn; when we cooked a handful of those versions we were totally unimpressed. To achieve a cleaner, more contemporary take, we ditched the corn muffin mix and canned corn and turned to frozen corn kernels, tangy sour cream, Monterey Jack cheese (cut into cubes for melty pockets inside and shredded for full coverage on top), nutty and flavorful grated Parmesan, and vibrant scallion greens and whites.



FRESH INGREDIENTS, FRESHER FLAVOR

Stuffed Acorn Squash

Our goal: to dress up this humble squash without weighing it down. BY ASHLEY MOORE

ACORN SQUASH, THOSE squat ridged numbers resembling giant acorns that appear every fall, are delicious simply roasted and mashed with butter. But come holiday time, we want to gussy them up a bit in a festive but not overburdened side dish.

Early tests of existing recipes, along with some research into our company's previous squash recipes, showed me that to get flesh that was velvety and soft but still stable enough to hold its shape, I'd have to precook the squash wedges before adding the stuffing. But precooking has a bonus: a bit of browning on the squash sides that adds a sweet, caramelized note. To maximize that browning, I positioned the squash wedges on their sides on a rimmed baking sheet and slid them into the oven to roast at 400 degrees. Twenty minutes later I flipped them over for even browning. In 15 more minutes they were soft enough that I could slip my knife easily into the flesh. Ready for the stuffing.

I'd been considering a wide range of options for that stuffing. It wasn't difficult to take too-filling grains like rice and barley out of the potential lineup. Meat was out, too—there'd be enough of that on the holiday table. I decided to focus on vegetables. But which ones?

Curly spinach and Swiss chard proved too slippery and insubstantial here, so I turned to sturdy, flavorful kale, cut into strips and sautéed in a skillet until just wilted. After spooning the precooked kale into the squash wedges and baking them for another 5 minutes, the kale had a pleasant texture.

But when I went to set the squash on a platter, the kale just tumbled right off. I needed a glue to make it stick. But what? A bunch of grated cheese? Some beaten egg? Nope: I wanted to avoid adding yet another ingredient. Instead, I found my glue right there on the sheet pan: roasted squash. For my next batch, I roasted eight wedges of squash (from two acorn squashes) and then scooped the flesh from two wedges and mashed it together with the kale. It baked up into a sturdy, cohesive filling.

To round out the flavors, I added some bright chopped apple, a bit of garlic and rosemary, a splash of cider vinegar, tangy crumbled goat cheese, and some crunchy nuts. I had a rustic but elegant holiday side dish that would leave plenty of room for, among other things, dessert.

STUFFED ACORN SQUASH

Serves 6

Of the eight wedges of squash, use the two that are least attractive for the stuffing. Any variety of kale will work in this recipe.

- 2 acorn squashes (1½ pounds each), quartered pole to pole and seeded
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- Salt and pepper
- 6 ounces kale, stemmed and sliced into ¼-inch-thick strips
- 1 Fuji or Gala apple, peeled, cored, and cut into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ½ teaspoon minced fresh rosemary
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled (½ cup)
- 2 tablespoons whole blanched almonds, toasted and chopped coarse

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Toss squash wedges, 2 tablespoons oil, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper together in bowl until thoroughly coated. Arrange wedges on rimmed baking sheet with 1 narrow cut side down. Roast until browned on first side, about 20 minutes. Flip wedges so other narrow cut side is down and continue to roast until browned on second side and tip of paring knife slips easily into flesh, about 15 minutes longer.

2. Remove sheet from oven and let wedges cool slightly. Once cool enough to handle, scoop flesh from 2 least attractive wedges into bowl; discard skins. (You should have about ¾ cup of scooped squash.) Turn remaining 6 wedges skin side down on sheet.

3. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add kale, apple, and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook, covered, until kale is wilted, about 3 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook until any liquid has evaporated, about 30 seconds. Stir in scooped squash, mashing with spoon to incorporate, and cook until beginning to brown, about 1 minute.

4. Push squash mixture to sides of skillet. Add garlic, rosemary, and remaining 1 tablespoon oil to center



Goat cheese and almonds add texture and flavor to the stuffed squash wedges.

of skillet and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir garlic mixture into squash mixture. Stir in vinegar and cook until evaporated, about 1 minute. Off heat, stir in butter and season with salt and pepper to taste.

5. Divide filling evenly among wedges on sheet. Evenly sprinkle goat cheese and almonds over filling. Bake until cheese is softened and squash heated through, 5 to 7 minutes. Drizzle with extra oil before serving.

STUFFED ACORN SQUASH WITH PEAR AND HAZELNUT

Substitute 1 ripe pear for apple, fresh thyme for rosemary, and 2 tablespoons finely chopped toasted and skinned hazelnuts for almonds.

TEST KITCHEN DISCOVERY Sacrificial Wedges

After searching high and low for the best binder for our stuffing, we found it under our noses: cooked squash scraped from two roasted wedges. It kept things cohesive without compromising the flavors.



PICK TWO
The roasted flesh from two wedges is incorporated into the filling.



Swiss Hazelnut Cake

This sweet, nutty, tender cake is famous in Philadelphia. We thought it deserved a bigger audience.

BY KATIE LEAIRD

A PHILADELPHIA GRANDMOTHER places a weathered black-and-white photograph on top of the bakery case at the Swiss Haus Bakery in the Center City neighborhood of Philadelphia. The faded picture shows her as a young bride a half-century ago, cutting through her Swiss Haus wedding cake. The woman wants to know if the bakery, which has been making the same recipes in the same building since 1923, can re-create this dessert for an upcoming celebration. The bakery can proudly fill this order, as a piece of Swiss Haus cake is a piece of living history.

When I visited the Swiss Haus Bakery to taste their famous hazelnut sponge cake, I found a beautiful cake frosted with a fluffy vanilla icing and covered in chocolate shavings. The cake itself was light and airy with a subtle nut flavor, the frosting delicate and sweet. I wanted to translate this local favorite into a cake anyone could make at home.

I started with the base cake. The Swiss Haus pastry chef, Donna Feldman, was trained decades ago by the founding family's baker and would not disclose the recipe. She did, however, give me a valuable tip: "It's all about the egg whites." I surmised that the cake was either a sponge or chiffon cake, as both of these use whipped egg whites to achieve their light, fluffy texture.

After testing, I settled on a chiffon base because it's simpler and more reliable than sponge: You just combine your wet and dry ingredients, fold in beaten egg whites, and bake. To get the signature nutty flavor, I tried adding hazelnut extract, but it tasted like hazelnut flavoring, not hazelnuts. I had better luck substituting toasted hazelnuts ground in a food processor into a flour-like texture for a portion of the flour. And there was no need to remove the nut skins after toasting, as they contributed to the cake's signature speckled look.

Swiss meringue buttercream, which is made by heating and whipping egg whites and sugar and then beating in softened butter, was the obvious frosting choice for its satiny texture. But this buttercream is a project and then some. Searching for a quicker path to a creamy, sweet frosting, I had a wacky idea: What if I replaced the Swiss buttercream's meringue base with marshmallow crème? Though it was intensely sweet



Swiss meringue buttercream frosting takes time to prepare. We found an excellent shortcut in marshmallow crème.

at first, adjusting the amounts of butter and powdered sugar and adding some hazelnut liqueur tempered the sweetness and made a perfectly pillowy frosting. This simple one-bowl method was a much easier approach.

Speaking of easy, shaving a block of chocolate to make the curls that adorn the cake was anything but. Watching me shake the cramps out of my hand, a colleague suggested trying the food

processor. I fitted the machine with the shredding disk and fed a standard chocolate bar through the top tube. It was the loudest noise in the kitchen that day, but it worked. However, by the time I processed a second bar, the mechanical friction started to melt the chocolate. So I slipped the shredding disk into the freezer for a bit. This temperature tweak allowed me to shave down two chocolate bars in mere seconds with no messy

melting, at least until I went to apply those curls to the cake. The heat from my hands instantly softened the delicate shards, ruining the look of the cake. Freezing the shaved chocolate and using a folded piece of parchment paper like a flexible putty knife to press the curls onto the cake solved the problem.

This tender, hazelnut-freckled cake is a tasty, beautiful reflection of its Philadelphia-born inspiration.

SWISS HAZELNUT CAKE

Serves 12 to 16

We toast and grind the hazelnuts with their skins for better color and flavor. We developed this recipe with Fluff brand marshmallow crème. When working with the marshmallow crème, grease the inside of your measuring cup and spatula with vegetable oil spray to prevent sticking. Note that the shredding disk should be placed in the freezer for 15 minutes before shaving the chocolate. You may use a vegetable peeler or the large holes of a box grater to shave the chocolate. In step 9, it's important to handle the chocolate shavings using the folded parchment paper so they don't melt from the heat of your hands.

CAKE

- ½ cup (2 ounces) skin-on hazelnuts, toasted and cooled
- 1¼ cups (5 ounces) cake flour
- 1 cup (7 ounces) granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ¼ cup water
- 3 large egg yolks, plus 5 large whites
- 2½ teaspoons vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

FROSTING

- 24 tablespoons (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1¾ cups (7 ounces) confectioners' sugar
- 12 ounces (2⅔ cups) Fluff brand marshmallow crème
- 2 tablespoons hazelnut liqueur
- 6 ounces bittersweet bar chocolate

1. FOR THE CAKE: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 light-colored 9-inch round cake pans with parchment paper; grease parchment but not pan sides.

2. Process hazelnuts in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and ground hazelnuts together in large bowl. Whisk oil, water, egg yolks, and vanilla together in separate bowl. Whisk egg yolk mixture into flour-nut mixture until smooth batter forms.

3. Using stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip egg whites and cream of tartar on medium-low speed until foamy, about 1 minute. Increase speed to medium-high and whip until soft peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes. Gently whisk one-third of whipped egg whites into batter. Using rubber spatula, gently fold remaining egg whites into batter until incorporated.

4. Divide batter evenly between prepared pans and gently tap pans on counter to release air bubbles. Bake until tops are light golden brown and cakes spring back when pressed lightly in center, 25 to 28 minutes, rotating pans halfway through baking.



**The American Table
A Sweet Deal**

In 1920, after five years of selling his homemade marshmallow crème door-to-door, a weary Archibald Query sold his recipe to H. Allen Durkee and Fred L. Mower for just \$500. The pair fired up production and radio promotion (the Flufferettes show aired just before Jack Benny) and made millions. More at CooksCountry.com/fluffpiece.

5. Let cakes cool in pans for 15 minutes. Run knife around edges of pans; invert cakes onto wire rack. Discard parchment and let cakes cool completely, at least 1 hour. (To prepare to make chocolate shavings, place food processor shredding disk in freezer.)

6. FOR THE FROSTING: Using clean stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip butter and salt on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Reduce speed to low and slowly add sugar. Increase speed to medium and whip until smooth, about 2 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add marshmallow crème, increase speed to medium-high, and whip until light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes. Reduce speed to low, add hazelnut liqueur, return speed to medium-high, and whip to incorporate, about 30 seconds.

7. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Fit food processor with chilled shredding disk. Turn on processor and feed chocolate bar through hopper. Transfer shaved chocolate to prepared baking sheet and spread into even layer. Place in freezer to harden, about 10 minutes.

8. Place 1 cake layer on cake stand. Spread 2 cups frosting evenly over top, right to edge of cake. Top with second cake layer, pressing lightly to adhere. Spread remaining 2 cups frosting evenly over top and sides of cake.

9. Fold 16 by 12-inch sheet of parchment paper into 6 by 4-inch rectangle. Using parchment rectangle, scoop up half of chocolate shavings and sprinkle over top of cake. Once top of cake is coated, scoop up remaining chocolate shavings and press gently against sides of cake to adhere, scooping and reapplying as needed. Serve.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT CAKE STAND?

A good cake stand makes cake decorating faster and easier by elevating the cake for better visibility and by rotating for quick and even frosting application. We still like our previous winner from Ateco, but it's prone to rusting. We started wondering—is there a better option?

To find out, we tested seven new models, priced from about \$23 to \$80, against new copies of the Ateco. We rated height, weight, stability, surface, and rotation.

Height and stability were paramount: Shorter stands, about 3 inches tall, didn't give us a clear view of the cake; taller stands, 4.5 to 6 inches tall, made it much easier to see all angles of the cake.

One pricey model (\$80) tilted for better access to the bottom edge of the cake, but it was jerky and unpredictable—it sent a whole cake crashing to the counter twice. Another stand with stability issues required a plate from our kitchen to hold the cake, which then sat atop the stand to spin but never felt secure.

Testers preferred surfaces with shallow circles etched in to help center cakes; some stands didn't have these guidelines, while others' guidelines were too pronounced and impeded frosting. Rotation was tricky—some stands were stiff, while others were loose; the best stands allowed us to stop the spin in one motion.

In the end we still liked our previous winner from Ateco, but we liked a model from Winco even more. At just under \$30, it was about \$20 cheaper than the Ateco and had two additional features we liked: an attached base and surface for easy transporting and rust-free washing, and guides on its surface for centering, helping make decorating like a pro that much easier. Read the full testing story and results chart at CooksCountry.com/dec15. —HANNAH CROWLEY

KEY Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

WINCO Revolving Cake Decorating Stand
Model: CKSR-12
Price: \$29.98
Surface Diameter: 11.5 in
Height: 5.3 in
Weight: 4.8 lb



Stability ★★★
Surface ★★★
Rotation ★★★

This stand was tall, providing excellent visibility and comfort. It was solid but light, and its surface and base were attached, which made it easy to carry. It rotated quickly and smoothly yet stopped right where we asked it to, and it had three shallow circles etched onto its surface for easy centering.

RECOMMENDED

ATECO Revolving Cake Stand
Model: 612
Price: \$49.38
Surface Diameter: 12 in
Height: 4.7 in
Weight: 5.6 lb



Stability ★★½
Surface ★★½
Rotation ★★★

Our previous winner still had a charming look, a smooth turning motion, and a precise stop. It was tall for excellent visibility, but it lacked guidelines for centering cakes. Its top and bottom came apart for easy cleanup, but if the parts weren't 100 percent dry when reassembled, they rusted together.

JOHNSON-ROSE Aluminum Cake Decorating Stand, Green Enamel
Model: 4612
Price: \$36.97
Surface Diameter: 11.75 in
Height: 4.8 in
Weight: 5.3 lb



Stability ★★½
Surface ★★★
Rotation ★★

This stand was tall with a wide surface. It had a nice sturdy base lined with grippy rubber that clung to the counter. It was easy to spin and had shallow circles etched onto its surface—handy for centering cakes. But while it spun smoothly, it didn't stop very well. It shimmied left and right before settling down, which made it slightly harder to work with.

KEY STEPS Producing Perfect Chocolate Shreds

Temperature and timing are key factors in creating uniform chocolate shavings.



Place food processor's shredding disk in freezer for 15 minutes.



Quickly feed chocolate bar through shredder, then freeze shavings.



Use parchment to gently press frozen chocolate shreds into frosting.



New Holiday Cookies

We dug deep into the cookie jar this year and found some unexpected treats. BY ERIKA BRUCE



CHOCOLATE SALAMI

Makes 24 cookies

There's nothing savory about this confection rooted in Portuguese and Italian tradition. With a base akin to a chocolate truffle, it's typically chock-full of dried fruit, nuts, and crushed cookies. To complete the salami look, the dough is rolled into logs before being dredged in confectioners' sugar. We liked the combination of dried cherries (first macerated in Grand Marnier) and pistachios, and we used dried ladyfingers as the cookie component—although any dry, biscuit-like cookie will work.

- ½ cup dried cherries, chopped coarse
- 2 tablespoons Grand Marnier
- 4 ounces dried ladyfingers (savoiardi), cut into ½-inch chunks
- 1 cup (6 ounces) semisweet or bittersweet chocolate chips
- ⅓ cup heavy cream
- Pinch salt
- ⅔ cup pistachios, toasted
- ½ cup (2 ounces) confectioners' sugar

1. Combine cherries and Grand Marnier in small bowl and microwave until hot, about 30 seconds; let sit until cherries have softened and mixture is cool, about 15 minutes. Reserve 1 cup ladyfingers. Process remaining ladyfingers in food processor to fine crumbs, 15 to 20 seconds. (You should have about ¾ cup.)

2. Microwave chocolate chips and cream in medium bowl at 50 percent power, stirring frequently, until melted and smooth, 30 to 60 seconds. Add salt and ladyfinger crumbs and stir to combine. Add pistachios, reserved ladyfingers, and cherry mixture and stir until thick dough forms.

3. Divide dough in half and place each half on large sheet of plastic wrap. Use plastic to roll each dough into tight 6-inch log, twisting ends well to secure. Refrigerate dough logs until firm, at least 3 hours. (Chilled dough can be stored in refrigerator for up to 3 days.)

4. When ready to serve, place confectioners' sugar in shallow dish. Unwrap dough logs and roll in sugar until well coated, brushing off excess. Cut each log into ½-inch-thick slices. Serve.

BISCOCHITOS

Makes about 40 cookies

A longtime New Mexican holiday tradition with Spanish roots, these crisp shortbread cookies are scented with anise seed and cinnamon. They are typically made with lard for a meltingly tender texture, but we opted for a combination of butter and shortening instead. Tossing the warm cookies in cinnamon sugar after baking gives them a sweet crunch.

- 1 cup (7 ounces) sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 tablespoon anise seeds
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 8 tablespoons vegetable shortening, cut into 1-inch chunks
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 2 cups (10 ounces) all-purpose flour

1. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Combine sugar and cinnamon in small bowl; reserve ½ cup cinnamon sugar in shallow dish. Grind anise seed in spice grinder until finely ground, about 10 seconds.

2. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat butter, shortening, salt,

remaining ½ cup cinnamon sugar, and ground anise on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed. Add yolk and vanilla and mix until combined.

3. Reduce speed to low, add flour, and mix until dough forms, about 10 seconds. Working on piece of parchment, roll dough into 9-inch circle, about ½-inch thick. Transfer dough on parchment to large plate, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes. Adjust oven racks to upper-middle and lower-middle positions and heat oven to 350 degrees.

4. Transfer dough, still on parchment, to cutting board. Using knife or pizza cutter, cut dough lengthwise into 1-inch-wide strips, then cut diagonally into 1-inch-wide strips to form diamonds. Space them evenly on prepared sheets, about 20 per sheet.

5. Bake until set and just starting to brown, about 15 minutes, switching and rotating sheets halfway through baking. Let cookies cool on sheets for 5 minutes. Gently toss cookies, a few at a time, in reserved cinnamon sugar. Transfer cookies to wire racks and let cool completely, about 1 hour.





ITALIAN RAINBOW COOKIES

Makes 60 cookies

With their green, white, and red stripes, these cookies are meant to look like diminutive Italian flags. The multicolored layers of cake are made with almond paste, filled with raspberry jam, and topped with rich dark chocolate.

- 2 cups (8 ounces) cake flour**
- ½ teaspoon baking powder**
- 1½ cups (10½ ounces) sugar**
- 8 ounces almond paste, cut into 1-inch pieces**
- 7 large eggs**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly**
- ⅛ teaspoon red food coloring**
- ⅛ teaspoon green food coloring**
- ⅔ cup seedless raspberry jam**
- 1 cup (6 ounces) bittersweet chocolate chips**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 13 by 9-inch baking pan. Make parchment paper sling by folding 1 long sheet of parchment 13 inches wide and laying across width of pan, with extra parchment hanging over edges of pan. Push parchment into corners and up sides of pan, smoothing parchment flush to pan. Grease parchment.

2. Combine flour and baking powder and sift into bowl; set aside. Process sugar and almond paste in food processor until combined, 20 to 30 seconds. Transfer sugar mixture to bowl of stand

mixer; add eggs, vanilla, and salt. Fit mixer with whisk and whip mixture on medium-high speed until pale and thickened, 5 to 7 minutes. Reduce speed to low and add melted butter. Slowly add flour mixture until just combined.

3. Transfer 2 cups batter to prepared pan and spread in even layer with offset spatula. Bake until top is set and edges are just starting to brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes in pan. Using parchment overhang, lift cake out of pan and transfer to wire rack. Let cake and pan cool completely.

4. Divide remaining batter between 2 bowls. Stir red food coloring into first bowl and green food coloring into second bowl. Make new parchment sling for now-empty pan and repeat baking with each colored batter, letting pan cool after each batch.

5. Invert red layer onto cutting board and gently remove parchment. Spread ⅓ cup jam evenly over top. Invert plain layer onto red layer and gently remove parchment. Spread remaining ⅓ cup jam evenly over top. Invert green layer onto plain layer and gently remove parchment.

6. Microwave chocolate chips in bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted, 2 to 4 minutes. Spread chocolate evenly over green layer. Let set for 2 minutes, then run fork in wavy pattern through chocolate. Let cool until chocolate has set, 1 to 2 hours. Using serrated knife, trim away edges. Cut lengthwise into 5 equal strips (about 1½ inches wide) and then crosswise into 12 equal strips (about 1 inch wide). Serve.

GINGERBREAD WHOOPIE PIES

Makes 24 sandwich cookies

This version of the beloved whoopie pie uses soft, cakey gingerbread for the cookies and tangy cream cheese frosting for the filling. Full of warm, seasonal spices with a nice gingery bite, these cookies will get you into the spirit.

- 2 cups (10 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- 4 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice**
- ¾ teaspoon baking soda**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- ¾ cup packed (5¼ ounces) light brown sugar**
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus 6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- ¼ cup molasses**
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped crystallized ginger**
- 1 large egg**
- ¼ cup buttermilk**
- 1½ cups (6 ounces) confectioners' sugar, plus extra for dusting**
- 6 ounces cream cheese, cut into 6 pieces and softened**

1. Whisk flour, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, and salt together in bowl. Whisk brown sugar, melted butter, molasses, and ginger together in large bowl until combined. Whisk

in egg and buttermilk until combined. Add flour mixture and stir with rubber spatula until dough just comes together. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours.

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Working with 1 scant tablespoon dough at a time, roll into 1-inch balls and space them evenly on prepared sheets, about 24 per sheet. Bake, 1 sheet at a time, until cookies have puffed and are just set, 11 to 13 minutes. Let cool on sheet for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire rack to cool completely.

3. Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat confectioners' sugar and remaining 6 tablespoons butter on medium-high speed until fluffy, about 2 minutes. With mixer running, add cream cheese, 1 piece at a time, and continue to beat until smooth, about 30 seconds. If frosting is very soft, refrigerate for 15 minutes before filling cookies. Spread or pipe 1 tablespoon frosting onto bottoms of half of cookies; sandwich frosting with remaining cookies, bottom side down, pressing gently to adhere. Dust with confectioners' sugar and serve.



Cider-Braised Pork Roast

Pork and apples are a tried-and-true combination. But cooking them together revealed some core problems. BY CECELIA JENKINS

WHETHER IT'S applewood-smoked bacon or pork chops served with applesauce, pork and apples are a classic combination. With this in mind, I set out to create a recipe for a pork roast slowly braised in cider.

I collected several recipes to test drive. They featured different cuts, different cooking times and temperatures, and supporting ingredients that ranged from onions and celery to orange and caraway. Out of the six recipes I prepared, not one was a success. The meat was bland and leathery in recipes that called for lean tenderloin or loin. Recipes that called for fattier cuts were greasy and produced tough, chewy meat. And they all had muddled flavors that didn't taste much like either pork or apples. I wanted a flavorful, tender roast infused with clean, bright, sweet-tart cider flavor.

I knew from experience that pork shoulder (also known as Boston butt or pork butt, the cut called for in recipes for pulled pork) is a good cut for braising—its fat and connective tissue break down over the long cooking time, resulting in silky, tender, flavorful meat. I tested bone-in versus boneless shoulder roasts, and my tasters preferred the moister meat that came off the bone-in roast; this made sense, because there is a lot of connective tissue around the bone that renders out during cooking, keeping the meat moist.

I rubbed the roast with a mixture of salt and brown sugar and refrigerated it overnight so the seasoning could penetrate it. This not only made the meat taste better, but the salt helped the muscle fibers hold onto moisture, which made the meat juicier, too. I seared the seasoned pork in a Dutch oven, poured in enough cider (1 3/4 cups) to come about halfway up the sides of the roast, and gently cooked it in a 300-degree oven until the meat registered 190 degrees and was completely tender. This pork was pretty good, but it was a little dry. Reducing the oven temperature to 275 degrees made for gentler cooking that kept the meat juicier. After about 2 1/2 hours, the pork was perfect.

It was time to fine-tune. I tested cutting the cider with other flavorful ingredients like chicken broth, wine, apple juice, and apple liqueur. Each



We sear the apple wedges in flavorful pork fat to unite the elements of this hearty roast.

one diluted or distracted from the clean taste of the cider. Onions, garlic, bay leaf, cinnamon (for a subtle warm note that goes well with cider), and thyme were welcome additions that built a baseline of savory flavor without muting the cider. But when the pork was done, the braising liquid—which, after defatting, becomes the sauce—wasn't thick enough for serving.

Boiling the sauce down on the stovetop worked but took more effort than I wanted to expend. I tried stirring a cup of apple butter into the braising liquid to thicken it and reinforce the apple flavor; my tasters loved the flavor but not the slippery texture. I decided to keep 1/4 cup of the apple butter for flavor. As for thickening, cornstarch

worked better here. I reserved 1/4 cup of cider, and, once the roast was done, whisked it together with 1 tablespoon of cornstarch. I then added this mixture, called a slurry, to the pot. It thickened the sauce beautifully.

I was almost at the end of my journey but felt that something was missing. How about actual apples? I tried adding wedges of apples to the braise at various points—from the get-go, in the middle, at the end—but the apples were consistently too hard, too soft, or too mealy. Simply searing the apples in the flavorful pork fat that I'd separated out of the braising liquid was the solution. This made for deliciously porky-sweet apples that held their shape and texture alongside the sliced roast.

CIDER-BRAISED PORK ROAST

Serves 8

Pork butt roast is often labeled Boston butt in the supermarket. Plan ahead: This roast needs to cure for 18 to 24 hours before cooking. If you can't find Braeburn apples, substitute Jonagold. If you don't have a fat separator, strain the liquid through a fine-mesh strainer into a medium bowl in step 4 and wait for it to settle.

- 1 (5- to 6-pound) bone-in pork butt roast
- 1/4 cup packed brown sugar
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 onion, halved and sliced thin
- 6 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
- 2 cups apple cider
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 2 Braeburn apples, cored and cut into 8 wedges each
- 1/4 cup apple butter
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar

1. Using sharp knife, trim fat cap on roast to 1/4 inch. Cut 1-inch crosshatch pattern, 1/16 inch deep, in fat cap. Place roast on large sheet of plastic wrap. Combine sugar and 1/4 cup salt in bowl and rub mixture over entire roast and into slits. Wrap roast tightly in double layer of plastic, place on plate, and refrigerate for 18 to 24 hours.

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 275 degrees. Unwrap roast and pat dry with paper towels, brushing away any excess salt mixture from surface. Season roast with pepper.

3. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just smoking. Sear roast until well browned on all sides, about 3 minutes per side. Turn roast fat side up. Scatter onion and garlic around roast and cook until fragrant and beginning to brown, about 2 minutes. Add 1 3/4 cups cider, thyme sprigs, bay leaves, and cinnamon stick and bring to simmer. Cover, transfer to oven, and braise until fork slips easily in and out of meat and meat registers 190 degrees, 2 1/4 to 2 3/4 hours.

4. Transfer roast to carving board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 30 minutes. Strain braising liquid

through fine-mesh strainer into fat separator; discard solids and let liquid settle for at least 5 minutes.

5. About 10 minutes before roast is done resting, wipe out pot with paper towels. Spoon 1½ tablespoons of clear, separated fat from top of fat separator into now-empty pot and heat over medium-high heat until shimmering. Season apples with salt and pepper. Space apples evenly in pot, cut side down, and cook until well browned on both cut sides, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer to platter and tent with foil.

6. Wipe out pot with paper towels. Return 2 cups defatted braising liquid to now-empty pot and bring to boil over high heat. Whisk in apple butter until incorporated. Whisk cornstarch and remaining ¼ cup cider together in bowl and add to pot. Return to boil and cook until thickened, about 1 minute. Off heat, add vinegar and season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover sauce and keep warm.

7. To carve roast, cut around inverted T-shaped bone until it can be pulled free from roast (use clean dish towel to grasp bone if necessary). Slice pork and transfer to serving platter with apples. Pour 1 cup sauce over pork and apples. Serve, passing remaining sauce at table.

Removing the Bone

Using a long knife and holding onto the tip of the T-shaped bone, cut the meat away from all sides of the bone until it is loose enough to pull out of the roast.



KEY EQUIPMENT Fat Separator

The best tool to remove excess fat for a silky, not greasy, sauce.



OUR FAVORITE
Trudeau Gravy Separator with
Integrated Strainer

Smothered Chicken

To do right by this simple dish, we smothered the pieces but not the flavor of the chicken. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

TOO OFTEN, chicken dishes taste like whatever else is in the dish rather than the chicken itself. But smothered chicken is designed to coax out as much chicken flavor as possible and then bolster it with supporting—not distracting—ingredients.

I tried a handful of existing recipes from some of the South's best cooks (including Edna Lewis and John Folse) to get my bearings and set my goals: big chicken flavor and weekday ease.

To start, I tossed chicken parts in lightly seasoned flour and browned them in batches in a Dutch oven to render some of the fat and build a base of flavor.

Once the chicken pieces were browned, I set them aside and began to add the ingredients for my smothering sauce. I found that a simple mix of onions and celery, plus some garlic and dried sage, gave me a clean, savory base that enhanced, rather than challenged, the rich flavor of chicken.

Achieving the right consistency for the sauce took some tinkering. Working with 2 cups of chicken broth, I tried as little as 2 teaspoons of flour up to as much as 3 tablespoons. The best consistency came from 2 tablespoons, added along with the garlic and cooked for a minute with the vegetables before whisking in chicken broth.

I returned the chicken to the sauce, covered the pot, and set it to simmer. I removed the breast pieces once they'd hit 160 degrees, about 30 minutes later, and let the dark-meat pieces cook a bit longer, until they hit 175. I piled the chicken on a platter, splashed a bit of cider vinegar into the sauce, and doused the lot. Smothered satisfaction.

SOUTHERN-STYLE SMOTHERED CHICKEN Serves 4

This dish is best served with rice, but it's also good with potatoes. You may substitute ground sage for the dried sage leaves, but decrease the amount to ¼ teaspoon.

- 3 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (split breasts cut in half crosswise, drumsticks, and/or thighs), trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 2 onions, chopped fine
- 2 celery ribs, chopped fine
- 3 garlic cloves, minced



This simple braise isn't flashy, but its robust chicken flavor is deeply satisfying.

- 1 teaspoon dried sage leaves
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

1. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Spread ½ cup flour in shallow dish. Working with 1 piece at a time, dredge chicken in flour, shaking off excess, and transfer to plate.

2. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add half of chicken to pot, skin side down, and cook until deep golden brown, 4 to 6 minutes per side; transfer to plate. Repeat with remaining chicken, adjusting heat if flour begins to burn.

3. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons fat

and return pot to medium heat. Add onions, celery, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and cook until softened, 6 to 8 minutes. Stir in garlic, sage, and remaining 2 tablespoons flour and cook until vegetables are well coated with flour and garlic is fragrant, about 1 minute. Whisk in broth, scraping up any browned bits.

4. Nestle chicken into sauce, add any accumulated juices from plate, and bring to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until breasts register 160 degrees and drumsticks/thighs register 175 degrees, 30 to 40 minutes.

5. Transfer chicken to serving dish. Stir vinegar into sauce and season with salt and pepper to taste. Pour sauce over chicken, sprinkle with parsley, and serve.



Cornish Pasties

Upper midwesterners have divisive opinions about this coal miner's classic.

We wanted our version to bring people together. BY KATIE LEAIRD

CORNISH PASTIES SHOULD be great: tender beef and vegetables wrapped in a flaky handheld crust. So I was surprised when one of our editors who ate these as a child told me, "The best thing about a pasty is the ketchup on the side."

Pasties do evoke strong feelings. Some fans adamantly oppose any vegetables in the filling other than potatoes and onions. Some, equally adamantly, endorse turnips, carrots, and rutabagas. Some recipes call for lard, while others use butter. Where to begin?

The mining industry in Michigan's Upper Peninsula attracted immigrants from Cornwall, England, in the 19th century (see "The American Table"); they brought their pasties with them. The miners' pasties were as big as dinner plates, filled with enough food to fuel an entire day's labor. The crust was sturdy enough for carrying and, some legends suggest, for protecting the contents even when dropped down the mine shaft.

A vibrant image, but I wanted a hand pie with a tender, not impact-resistant, crust. After experimenting with flour doughs made with lard, shortening, and butter (and various combinations thereof), my tasters agreed that butter imparted the best flavor into the crust.

To make a pliable dough that would be easy to manipulate and shape, I added an egg and, instead of water, cold sour cream, which added a pleasant flavor. The food processor allowed me to mix quickly and avoid overworking the dough. I pressed it into a disk, wrapped it, and refrigerated it; the cold dough was much easier to work with.

In initial tests, my pasty fillings (beef, chopped onion, potato, and salt and pepper) were bland. I sautéed the onion in butter to deepen its flavor and added minced garlic and fresh thyme.

I chose cubed meat over ground (the latter gave me patties, not pasties), and after trying several cuts, I settled on skirt steak. It went, raw, into the cooled onions along with cubed potatoes and—after much testing and impassioned debate—earthy rutabaga. I seasoned the mixture with salt and pepper then tossed it with flour to help the meat create its

own gravy while it baked.

The final hurdle was construction. I rolled the pieces of dough into ovals and spooned some filling into the center of each. I brushed their edges with water to help them stick and folded the ovals over the filling to create half-moon shapes. I pressed the edges together, then trimmed and crimped for a neat finish.

To create an escape vent for steam (and forestall any leakage in the oven), I cut a small slit in the top of each pie. After 45 minutes, the pies were golden brown, with the filling just bubbling up through the vents.

Like the original miners' fare, these pasties are hearty, but the crust is more flaky than fortified. I'm as likely to fork-and-knife one as I am to eat it out of my hands. Ketchup optional.

CORNISH PASTIES Serves 4

You can substitute turnips for rutabagas if you like. If you can't find skirt steak, you can use 1½ pounds of blade steak. The extra ¼ pound accounts for the trimming required with the blade cut. The pasties fit best on the baking sheet when placed crosswise in two rows of three. Serve the pasties with ketchup, if desired.

CRUST

- ¾ cup sour cream, chilled**
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten**
- 3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- 1¾ teaspoons salt**
- 16 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch pieces and chilled**

FILLING

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter**
- 1 onion, chopped fine**
- Salt and pepper**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1¼ pounds skirt steak, trimmed and cut into ½-inch pieces**
- 10 ounces russet potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces**
- 10 ounces rutabaga, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces**
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour**
- 1 large egg**

1. FOR THE CRUST: Whisk sour cream and egg together in small bowl. Process flour and salt in food processor until combined, about 3 seconds. Add butter and pulse until only pea-size pieces remain, about 10 pulses. Add half



Sure, you can use a fork, but these savory, meaty pies are usually eaten by hand.

of sour cream mixture and pulse until combined, about 5 pulses. Add remaining sour cream mixture and pulse until dough begins to form, about 15 pulses.

2. Transfer mixture to lightly floured counter and knead briefly until dough comes together. Form dough into 6-inch disk, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 30 minutes. (Dough can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours; let chilled dough sit on counter for 15 minutes to soften before rolling.)

3. FOR THE FILLING: Melt butter in 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add onion and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add thyme and garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Let cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Combine cooled

onion mixture, steak, potatoes, rutabaga, 2 teaspoons salt, and ¾ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Add flour and toss to coat.

4. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Remove dough from refrigerator and cut into 6 equal pieces (about 5 ounces each); cover with plastic wrap. Divide filling into 6 equal portions, about 1 heaping cup each.

5. Working with 1 piece of dough at a time, roll into 10 by 8-inch oval (about ⅛ inch thick) on lightly floured counter. Place 1 portion filling in center of dough. Moisten edges of dough with water, then fold narrow end of oval over filling to form half-moon shape. Press dough around filling to adhere.

Discover the pasty's Southern cousin, the Natchitoches meat pie.
CooksCountry.com/natchitochespies.



The American Table Miners' Meals

Starting in 1843, the wilderness of Michigan's Upper Peninsula was the site of an epic copper boom. Miners flocked to the region from around the world; many came from Cornwall, England. By 1903 Red Jacket, the region's primary city, had a 50,000-volume library, an elaborate opera house where Caruso and Bernhardt performed, and eight separate foreign-language newspapers. Then, in 1913, a long, bloody strike started the city's slow but steady decline. Today Red Jacket, renamed Calumet, is a village of some 700 people in a region of ghost towns. Not everything has vanished, though; as is so often the case, food is the last tradition to die, and the Cornish pasty lives on to recall the glory days of King Copper. —JOHN WILLOUGHBY

The Best Way to Cook Broccoli

The secret to crisp-tender, brilliantly green broccoli? Nuke it. Yes, we're serious.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON



Our technique is easy: cut, microwave, drain, and dress.

When it comes to broccoli, roasting and sautéing have their advantages (brown edges, crisp florets) but for even cooking every time, quickly, we turn to the microwave.

The reason? Water. Unlike standard ovens, which cook food through the direct application of heat, a microwave uses electromagnetic waves to penetrate the food. When the food is mostly water (like broccoli, which is 91 percent water), the microwave steams it from the inside.

Careful cutting is essential to even cooking: I found that the broccoli was best when I cut the florets into 1-inch pieces and then used a vegetable peeler to remove the fibrous exterior from the very flavorful stem (too often discarded) and cut it into ½-inch cubes. I tossed everything with a bit of salt in a microwave-safe bowl, no added water necessary. Tests confirmed that tightly covering the bowl with plastic was no more effective than just laying a plate on top, so I covered the bowl with a plate, slipped it into the microwave, and pressed “cook.”

Five minutes wasn't enough, and 10 minutes was too long: The Goldilocks timing in our 1,200-watt test kitchen microwaves was 7 minutes for perfectly tender, brightly colored broccoli. Some microwaves are stronger than others, though—power can range from 700 watts in older or smaller models to between 1,000 and 1,500 watts in newer, larger models—so I tested my method in several different ovens with different wattages. I found that ovens with under 1,000 watts needed around 10 minutes. My advice: The first time you make this recipe, check your broccoli about a minute before you think it's done, just in case.

This broccoli is tasty enough to eat straight from the microwave, but a quick toss with a flavored oil enhances its appeal.

BROCCOLI WITH LEMON-OREGANO DRESSING

Serves 4

We developed this recipe in a full-size 1,200-watt microwave. If you're using a compact microwave with 800 watts or fewer, increase the cooking time to about 10 minutes.

- 1½ pounds broccoli
- Salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh oregano
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¾ teaspoon grated lemon zest

1. Trim broccoli florets from stalk. Cut florets into 1-inch pieces. Trim and discard lower 1 inch of stalk. Using vegetable peeler, peel away outer ⅛ inch of stalk. Cut stalk into ½-inch chunks.

2. Place broccoli in bowl and toss with ½ teaspoon salt. Microwave, covered, until broccoli is bright green and just tender, 6 to 8 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, whisk oil, oregano, garlic, lemon zest, and ¼ teaspoon salt together in bowl.

4. Drain broccoli in colander, then return to bowl. Add dressing and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

BROCCOLI WITH ANCHOVY-GARLIC DRESSING

Omit lemon zest. Substitute 2 rinsed and minced anchovy fillets for oregano and add ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes to dressing in step 3.

For our variation featuring sesame-miso dressing, go to CooksCountry.com/dec15.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Forming Pasties

After chilling the dough for at least 30 minutes, it's ready to shape and fill.



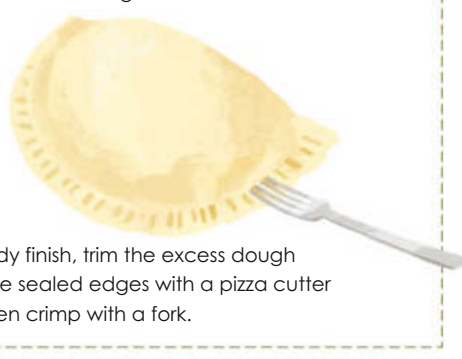
Divide dough into 6 equal pieces. Roll each into an oval and place filling in the center.



Brush the edges of the dough with water and fold them over the filling to create a half-moon shape. Press the edges to seal.



For a tidy finish, trim the excess dough from the sealed edges with a pizza cutter and then crimp with a fork.



6. Trim any ragged edges, then crimp edges with fork to seal; transfer to prepared sheet. (For more decorative edge, trim any ragged edges and, starting at one end, pinch and slightly twist dough diagonally across seam between your thumb and index finger. Continue pinching and twisting dough around seam.) Repeat with remaining dough and filling.

7. Using paring knife, cut 1-inch vent hole on top of each pasty. Whisk egg and 2 teaspoons water in bowl. Brush pasties with egg wash. Bake until crust is golden

brown and filling is bubbling up through vent hole, about 45 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Transfer pasties to wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

TO MAKE AHEAD

Pasties can be prepared through step 6, then frozen on baking sheet. Once frozen, pasties can be stored in zipper-lock bag for up to 1 month. To cook from frozen, bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour 5 minutes to 1 hour 10 minutes.

It's not just for guzzling. We use beer's flavor and fizz in dozens of recipes.

What, exactly, is beer? It's the nectar created when malt (a grain, most often barley, that has germinated and then been dried and/or roasted) is mixed with water, strained, and the resulting liquid fermented. Fermentation is the process—triggered by yeast or bacteria—that converts the sugar in the malt into acid, gas, and/or alcohol. Many beers are flavored with hops, the seed cones of a climbing vine, which add flowery, bitter, and piney flavors to the mix.



Session

ALL-DAY SIPPER

Session beers were invented as a response to ever-increasing alcohol percentages in craft beers such as India Pale Ales. The addition of more hops doesn't just increase a craft beer's flavor, it also sends its alcohol content by volume (ABV) sky high (between 8 and 12 percent). Session beers are brewed with the same care for flavor as craft beers, but with an ABV usually between 4 and 5 percent.



Lager

GO-TO BREW

Unlike ales, which ferment at high temperatures for more yeast activity and flavor, lagers ferment at cool temperatures before aging to develop more subtle, crisp flavors. Lagers (such as Budweiser) tend to be light- to medium-bodied, which makes them ideal for use in cooking. We use lager for beer batters as well as for cooking our Beer-Braised Cabbage (CooksCountry.com/beerbraisedcabbage).



Pilsner

GOLDEN BUBBLES

This light, gold- to straw-colored beer gets its name from its birthplace in Pilsen, Bohemia (now Czech Republic). Though it's brewed like lager, it's lighter in color and body and has a floral, slightly spicy finish thanks to the Saaz hops that are traditionally used. True pilsners often have a high level of carbonation due to months of aging. Try it in our recipe for Almond Boneless Chicken (page 23).



Saison

MIXED HARVEST

In the Belgian tradition, seasonal workers who helped with the harvest were paid with beer made by the farmer's wife from leftover mixed grains. Folklore aside, saisons are funky, yeasty, hoppy ales made from mixed grains and noble hops. Saisons pair well with food, especially cheese. American beers brewed in the same style are often labeled "farmhouse" ales.



India Pale Ale

HOPPED AND LOADED

The extra hops in this style of beer were originally added as a preservative to help it survive the long trek from London to the colonies in India in the late 18th century. European noble hops lend vegetal, grassy flavors to some IPAs, while Cascade hops from North America introduce flavors of citrus and pine. Beware: the hoppier the beer, the higher the ABV.



Porter

WORKING MAN'S PINT

Relatively low-alcohol porters first became popular with London's transportation workers. They are known for their chocolate, toffee, and toasty flavors, which come from the malts used to make them—these dark malts are what make porter so dark. The roasted malt flavors make porter a great match for grilled meats.



Stout

IRISH FAVORITE

This dark, rich brew uses toasted malts, giving stouts roasted, sometimes bitter coffee-like notes. Since sugars are cooked off during roasting, the resulting stouts are usually lower in alcohol (and calories) than you'd expect. The deep flavor and full body of stout makes it a natural pairing with roasted and braised meats. Try our Guinness Beef Stew (CooksCountry.com/guinnessbeefstew).



Wheat Beer

WEIZ GUY

Wheat beers have a hazy, unfiltered look and taste of clove, banana, and citrus. Brewers rely on warm fermentation (most beers are fermented in cooler temperatures) and a particular strain of yeast to produce the yeasty, spicy flavor of what they call *Weissbier*, *Weizenbier*, or *Hefeweizen* (*hefe* is yeast, *weizen* is wheat). Try wheat beer in our Grill-Braised Short Ribs (CooksCountry.com/grillbraisedshortribs).



Lambic

WILD THING

Lambics are dry, sour, and tart Belgian wheat beers that are often infused with fruit. Before brewing, lambic wort (a mix of crushed grain and water) is fermented in the open air, where it develops flavor from wild yeasts. *Kreik* and *framboise* are lambics fermented with cherries and raspberries, respectively. The high acidity of lambics makes them pair well with shellfish or oily fish like salmon or bluefish.



Sour Beer

FOOD'S FRIEND

Sour beer starts with sweet malt that undergoes warm fermentation. The fermented beer is then placed in old wooden barrels full of wild yeasts and other yeast strains for a second or third fermentation. Bacteria in the barrels eat the sugars in the beer, which produces a beer that is tart and sour, though often sweeter than lambic. Like lambic, sour beers are excellent paired with rich or fatty foods.



Trappist

MONK-Y BUSINESS

More of a tradition than a specific style of beer, Trappist beers are produced by Cistercian monks in 11 European monasteries. The monks follow a brewing method known for its discipline and high standards. The beers are slightly sweet, hoppy, and spicy. Their alcohol levels vary, from around 7 percent to up to 9 percent. Secular brews that mimic the style of Trappist beers are often called "Abbey" ales.

Apple-Cinnamon Muffins

It's a simple idea—muffins with bright apple flavor—so why was it so hard to get right? BY REBECCA MARSTERS

APPLE-CINNAMON MUFFINS, soft and crumbly with vibrant fruit flavor and spicy cinnamon. It's such a simple idea. But, as I learned after testing dozens of existing recipes, the goal is frustratingly elusive. The methods I found were similar (simple batters of oil or melted butter, flour, eggs, and dairy)—until it came to adding in fruit. The recipes I experimented with called for a bewildering array of treatments: grating the apples, cooking them down to a sauce, or just chopping and adding them raw.

All the muffins were failures. Some were wet, others dense, and yet others flavorless. One muffin could only be eaten with a spoon. These disasters only steeled my resolve, though: I was determined to devise a simple recipe for tender apple muffins with plenty of fruit flavor and crunchy sugar tops.

Drawing on the test kitchen's huge reserve of muffin recipes, I started with a basic roster of dry ingredients: flour, salt, cinnamon, and, for maximum rise, both baking powder and baking soda. I mixed in oil and melted butter (for the ideal combination of texture and flavor) along with sugar, beaten eggs, and buttermilk. I folded in chopped Granny Smiths and spooned the batter into muffin tins. After baking, I had beautiful, tender muffins that tasted nothing like apple.

We've found that the best way to amp up the flavor of apples is to drive off moisture with some heat. I grabbed a skillet and sautéed my chopped apples briefly in butter. I then let them cool while I stirred together another batch of batter. These muffins were much improved, with concentrated apple flavor. Another test, in which I incorporated brown sugar and a pinch of salt into the apple sauté, gave me even better muffins: The sugar helped the apples brown and develop a caramel flavor.

I wanted even more apple flavor, so for my next round, I substituted apple juice and apple cider for some of the buttermilk. These modifications created thinner batters, but I baked them off anyway, to great acclaim from my tasters—for the cider version, anyway (the muffins made with apple juice were sickeningly sweet).

The flavor was finally where I wanted it to be, but the muffins weren't doming as well as before—the thin batter was just not rising as reliably. Not willing

to give up the added flavor, I instead swapped the buttermilk for equally tangy, but more stable, plain yogurt. I was back to a thick batter that, once baked, rose high and round.

For a finishing touch, I added a sprinkle of cinnamon sugar over each muffin for that crucial crunchy sugar top.

APPLE-CINNAMON MUFFINS

Makes 12 muffins

Do not substitute apple juice for the apple cider. Make sure to spray the muffin tin thoroughly, inside the cups and on top.

TOPPING

- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

MUFFINS

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus 4 tablespoons melted
- 2 Granny Smith apples (6½ ounces each), peeled, cored, and cut into ¼-inch pieces (3 cups)
- 2 tablespoons packed brown sugar
- ¾ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2½ cups (12½ ounces) all-purpose flour
- 2½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- 1 cup (7 ounces) granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup apple cider
- ½ cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. FOR THE TOPPING: Using your fingers, combine granulated sugar, brown sugar, and cinnamon in bowl. Cover and set aside.

2. FOR THE MUFFINS: Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Spray 12-cup muffin tin generously with vegetable oil spray. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add apples, brown sugar, and ¼ teaspoon cinnamon. Cook, stirring often, until moisture has completely evaporated and apples are well browned, about 9 minutes. Remove pan from heat and let cool for 10 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and remaining ½ teaspoon cinnamon together in large bowl. Whisk granulated sugar, eggs, oil, and remaining 4 tablespoons



A crunchy cinnamon-sugar topping adds texture and flavor to these moist, tender muffins.

melted butter together in separate bowl until thick and homogeneous, about 30 seconds. Whisk cider, yogurt, and vanilla into sugar mixture until combined.

4. Fold sugar mixture and cooled apples into flour mixture until just combined. Using greased ⅓-cup dry measuring cup, divide batter evenly among prepared muffin cups (cups will be filled to rim); sprinkle muffin tops evenly with topping.

5. Bake until golden brown and toothpick inserted in center comes out with few crumbs attached, 18 to 22 minutes, rotating muffin tin halfway through baking. Let muffins cool in muffin tin on wire rack for 10 minutes. Remove muffins from tin to wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes longer. Serve.

KEY STEP Precook the Apples



Raw apples stirred into muffin batter will weep liquid in the oven, making for soggy muffins. We solved this problem by cooking the apple pieces in butter (with brown sugar and cinnamon) first.



Crab Louis Salad

Once the king of salads, this 20th-century concoction was relegated to the history books. We aimed to restore the monarchy. BY ASHLEY MOORE

EARLY LAST CENTURY, the question of who invented Crab Louis inspired vigorous debate in western states. Restaurants from Puget Sound to Santa Cruz claimed ownership of this tangy salad of flaky crabmeat, crisp lettuce, and an array of add-ins like tomatoes and hard-cooked eggs, all mixed with a creamy Thousand Island-style dressing. I wanted to bring it back for contemporary tables. But first I wanted to find out its story.

After much digging, our culinary research expert helped clear up the dish's murky origins. The first Crab Louis-style salad listed on a menu was at one of San Francisco's oldest restaurants, the Old Poodle Dog. Founded in 1849, the restaurant (which also maintained upstairs rooms where male clientele would visit with women whose companionship came with an hourly rate) was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake but quickly rebuilt. Just two years later, chef Louis Coutard, working with a bumper crop of crab, developed "Crab Leg à la Louis," the earliest version of Crab Louis. By the time Coutard died just a few years later, the salad had become a favorite.

Recipes for Crab Louis abound in our cookbook library; I assembled several for my tasters to sample. They were uniformly uninspiring, ranging from overdressed and gloppy to bland and dull. Some called for iceberg lettuce, others for romaine, even one for mixed greens. The team gave all of these the thumbs-down. Instead, they demanded Bibb lettuce, and, after a taste test, I gave them what they wanted. Grape tomatoes won over chopped tomatoes for their consistent sweetness. Adding wedges of hard-cooked egg was a no-brainer.

The dressings I found were equally disappointing; both cloying and boring. My route would be to take the best qualities from each and cobble together something that sang to my tasters. Some dressings had a mayonnaise base, others sour cream. Tasters were divided, so I split the difference and used both. To round out the flavor and texture, I auditioned a wide array of add-ins before settling on chopped green bell pepper, scallions, and, for a bit of brininess, green olives. I also included lemon juice, of course (it's ideal with crab), and—for that signature spicy note—chili sauce.

The elephant in the room, of course, was the crab. Coutard used Dungeness,



With its zesty dressing and wealth of flavorful ingredients, this retro classic is perfectly suited to modern tastes.

that inimitable seasonal crab that floods West Coast markets every year, but I needed something widely available at any time of year. Fresh crabmeat—the good stuff at the seafood counter—won

the day for its sweet, oceanic flavor and soft texture, but in a pinch, canned claw or backfin meat works well, too.

Retro in all the right ways, my Crab Louis Salad was fit for a new century.

CRAB LOUIS SALAD

Serves 4 to 6

Purchase high-quality, fresh crabmeat for this recipe. However, if you can only find canned crab meat, we prefer either claw or backfin meat or a combination thereof (see "Know Your Crab"). Chili sauce, a condiment similar to ketchup, has a sweet flavor and a subtle, spicy kick; do not substitute Asian chili-garlic sauce.

DRESSING

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup mayonnaise
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sour cream
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup finely chopped green bell pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sliced scallions
- 2 tablespoons chopped pitted green olives
- 2 tablespoons chili sauce
- 5 teaspoons lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh tarragon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper

SALAD

- 1 pound fresh crabmeat, picked over for shells and pressed dry between paper towels
- 2 heads Bibb lettuce (1 pound), leaves separated and torn into $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces
- $7\frac{1}{2}$ ounces grape tomatoes, halved
- 3 hard-cooked eggs, quartered
- 1 ripe avocado, halved, pitted, quartered, and sliced thin

1. FOR THE DRESSING: Whisk all ingredients together in bowl.

2. FOR THE SALAD: Gently toss crabmeat with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dressing in bowl. Mound lettuce in center of serving platter. Arrange tomatoes, eggs, and avocado around lettuce. Top lettuce with dressed crab and serve with remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dressing.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE Know Your Crab

The best meat comes from crabs you've caught yourself, but you'll find acceptable options at the supermarket.



BACKFIN
Small shreds, good in crab cakes.



CLAW MEAT
Higher in fat, deeper in flavor.



JUMBO LUMP
Largest chunks, most expensive.



LUMP
Light in color, delicate flavor.

Pork Saltimbocca

This elegant-looking and fancy-sounding dish is actually easy to make—
if you follow our simple technique. BY ASHLEY MOORE

SALTIMBOCCA, WHICH ROUGHLY translates as “jumps in the mouth” in Italian, is a traditional Roman dish popular in Italian American restaurants. In the classic version, thin veal cutlets are topped with prosciutto and sage, rolled into bundles, seared, and then finished in a bright white wine-and-butter sauce. More common today are deconstructed versions that lay the sage and prosciutto on top of a thin piece of veal (or chicken) before sautéing and saucing.

My goal was to reinvent this dish using pork tenderloin, a cut that, like veal and chicken, is mild and tender. I gathered and prepared a handful of recipes, and my tasters and I found plenty of problems to fix, including tough and chewy meat and out-of-balance flavors.

Different recipes call for various methods for getting the prosciutto to adhere to the pork. Using a toothpick is most common, but I wasn't keen on biting into a forgotten toothpick. Other recipes place the sage between the pork and prosciutto, but I found that this made the sage taste steamed and unpleasantly grassy. Another technique is to pound the prosciutto and sage into the meat, which has the added benefit of flattening the cutlets so they brown more evenly in the skillet. When I tried this approach, the pounding made the prosciutto adhere perfectly, but getting the sage to stay put was a bit of a challenge. Thankfully, a colleague suggested dipping the sage leaf into beaten egg white and lightly pounding it into the prosciutto. It worked.

Store-bought pork cutlets are often cut from the loin, which means they can be very lean and are easy to overcook. In the test kitchen, we prefer to make our own pork cutlets out of buttery-soft pork tenderloin (which has a similar texture to the more expensive veal)—just cut a 1-pound tenderloin into four pieces and then pound each one, cut side up, to a ¼-inch thickness. I was able to nail down the timing through a series of tests: I cooked the pork, prosciutto side down, in a hot skillet for 2 minutes, flipped, and cooked for just another minute. This resulted in tender, juicy pork and perfectly crisp prosciutto.

A quick, traditional saltimbocca pan sauce made of chicken broth, white wine, garlic, and lemon juice highlighted the pork and sage flavors. To bump up

the flavor even more, I started the sauce by blooming a bit of extra minced sage with garlic in hot oil.

PORK SALTIMBOCCA Serves 4

Cutlets longer than 5 inches will crowd the skillet; trim large pieces as necessary.

- 2 (1-pound) pork tenderloins, trimmed**
- Salt and pepper**
- 8 thin slices prosciutto (3 ounces)**
- 8 large fresh sage leaves, plus**
- 1 teaspoon minced**
- 1 large egg white, lightly beaten**
- 3 tablespoons olive oil**
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced thin**
- 1 cup chicken broth**
- ¼ cup dry white wine**
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into**
- 4 pieces and chilled**
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice**

1. Cut each tenderloin crosswise into 4 equal pieces. Working with 1 piece at a time, place pork, cut side down, between 2 pieces of plastic wrap. Using meat pounder, gently pound to even ¼-inch thickness. (Pieces should be about 5 inches long.) Pat pork dry with paper towels and season with pepper.

2. Place 1 prosciutto slice on top of each cutlet, folding as needed to prevent overhang. Dip 1 side of each sage leaf in egg white and place 1 leaf, egg side down, in center of each prosciutto slice. Cover with plastic and pound lightly until prosciutto and sage adhere to pork.

3. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add half of pork to skillet, prosciutto side down, and cook until lightly browned, about 2 minutes. Using tongs, carefully flip pork and cook until second side is light golden brown, about 1 minute. Transfer to platter and tent with aluminum foil. Repeat with remaining pork.

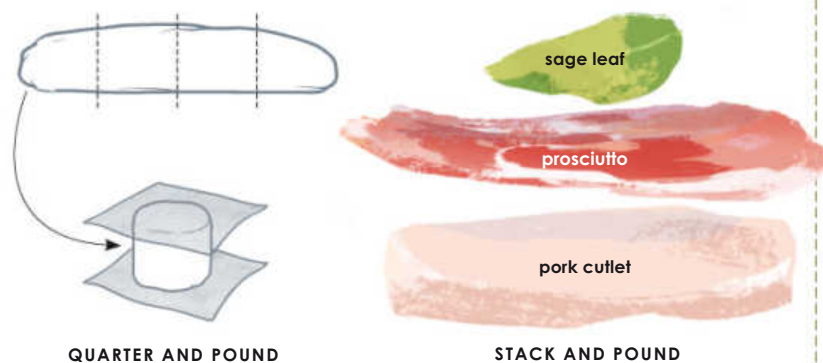
4. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil to now-empty skillet and heat over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add garlic and minced sage and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in broth and wine and simmer until reduced to ½ cup, 5 to 7 minutes, scraping up any browned bits. Reduce heat to low and whisk in butter, 1 piece at a time. Stir in lemon juice and any accumulated meat juices from platter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Spoon sauce over pork and serve.



Minced fresh sage in the sauce reinforces the floral, piney pop of the whole sage leaves.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE The Layered Effect

We divide each tenderloin into four even pieces and then turn each piece on its end between sheets of plastic and pound it thin. We top each cutlet with prosciutto and a sage leaf dipped in egg white, pounding them gently to adhere.





Spicy Cheese Bread

How much cheese could we pack into this Wisconsin favorite without producing a greasy brick of dough? BY KATIE LEAIRD

DON'T BE ANGRY IF you're bumped in the back when wandering through the farmers' market in Madison, Wisconsin. It is likely that the person who walked into you has his or her attention on a giant loaf of steaming, fragrant bread and is pulling off chunks and gobbling them down as he or she strolls. Stella's bakery sells dozens of loaves of their famous spicy cheese bread at the market, where the soft, sweet, chewy, cheesy, spicy snack is legendary.

Since not everyone has easy access to Stella's and the market in Madison, I set out to create a similarly delicious bread back in the test kitchen—one that took minimal active work and yielded a substantial reward. No small task.

I experimented with various breads, including brioche and country-style, but quickly settled on challah as the best. The eggy dough baked up soft, with a thin golden crust, and, as I was thrilled to discover, took just 5 minutes of kneading—in a stand mixer. That's zero minutes by hand.

A much tougher nut to crack was how to add in the cheese. I wanted it to be fully incorporated, but I didn't want to lose the little bits of ooze. I started with the easiest option: simply tossing shredded cheese into the stand mixer while the bread was kneading.

Sadly, when I set the dough aside to rise, not much happened. I placed it on a baking sheet and baked it anyway. What a greasy bust that was. When incorporated this way, the cheese bogged down the dough and prevented it from rising.

I skipped the cheese on my next round and allowed the dough to rise for 2 hours on its own. Then, I rolled the rested, risen dough into an 18 by 12-inch rectangle with the long side facing the counter's edge and sprinkled cheese cubes and pepper flakes evenly over the top. I formed the dough into a tight cylinder and then gently rolled it back and forth on the counter until it measured 30 inches long. I spiraled the dough log and placed it on a baking sheet. After letting it rest and rise a second time, it baked into an even loaf with well-distributed pockets of cheese. (My tasters and I chose a combination of Monterey Jack and provolone for a mild, melty mix.)

But unfortunately the bread was too



A sprinkling of red pepper flakes on top—anchored by beaten egg—reinforces the heat from the pepper flakes in the dough.

dense—nowhere near as soft and airy as the cheeseless challah that I'd baked before. I worried that I'd added too much cheese, so I dialed it back and tried again, to no avail.

On the way to the fridge to gather cheese for yet another experiment, it hit me: Yeast is most active in a warm, moist environment. Perhaps the cheese I was taking straight from the refrigerator was bringing down the temperature of the

dough and inhibiting the yeast. So I let the cheese come to room temperature before adding it to the dough. Sure enough, it rose visibly more this time, and after an egg wash and a generous sprinkle of red pepper flakes (that's the spicy part), the light, chewy, stretchy bread was just right.

Except for one thing: It was losing its shape as it baked. I put together another loaf, this time baking it in a cake pan

rather than on a sheet (see "Shaping Spicy Cheese Bread"). Bingo. My spiral shape was intact, and covering it with foil halfway through its time in the oven protected the top from getting too dark and the sprinkled pepper flakes from burning.

The final step was key: A generous brush of melted butter applied shortly after the loaf came out of the oven helped the crust stay supple and gave it a shine.

How Many Loaves?

We made more than 60 loaves of spicy cheese bread before we found the best way to form each loaf (see “Shaping Spicy Cheese Bread” below). One sticking point was choosing a type of cheese for maximum meltability; a mix of Monterey Jack and provolone won the day.



SPICY CHEESE BREAD Makes 1 loaf

Take the cheese out of the refrigerator when you start the recipe to ensure that it comes to room temperature by the time you need it. Cold cheese will retard rising. Plan ahead: The dough needs to rise for several hours before baking.

BREAD

- 3¼ cups (16¼ ounces) all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup (1¾ ounces) sugar
- 1 tablespoon instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 1½ teaspoons red pepper flakes
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- ½ cup warm water (110 degrees)
- 2 large eggs plus 1 large yolk
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 6 ounces Monterey Jack cheese, cut into ½-inch cubes (1½ cups), room temperature
- 6 ounces provolone cheese, cut into ½-inch cubes (1½ cups), room temperature

TOPPING

- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened

1. FOR THE BREAD: Whisk flour, sugar, yeast, pepper flakes, and salt together in bowl of stand mixer. Whisk warm water, eggs and yolk, and melted butter together in liquid measuring cup. Add egg mixture to flour mixture. Fit mixer with dough hook and knead on medium speed until dough clears bottom and sides of bowl, about 8 minutes.

2. Transfer dough to unfloured

counter, shape into ball, and transfer to greased bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise in warm place until doubled in size, 1½ to 2 hours.

3. Grease 9-inch round cake pan. Transfer dough to unfloured counter and press to deflate. Roll dough into 18 by 12-inch rectangle with long side parallel to counter’s edge. Distribute Monterey Jack and provolone evenly over dough, leaving 1-inch border around edges. Starting with edge closest to you, roll dough into log. Pinch seam and ends to seal, then roll log so seam side is down. Roll log back and forth on counter, applying gentle, even pressure, until log reaches 30 inches in length. If any tears occur, pinch to seal.

4. Starting at one end, wind log into coil; tuck end underneath coil. Place loaf in prepared cake pan and cover loosely with clean dish towel. Let rise in warm place until doubled in size, 1 to 1½ hours. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees.

5. FOR THE TOPPING: Brush top of loaf with egg, then sprinkle with pepper flakes. Place cake pan on rimmed baking sheet. Bake until loaf is golden brown, about 25 minutes. Rotate loaf, tent with aluminum foil, and continue to bake until loaf registers 190 degrees, 25 to 30 minutes longer.

6. Transfer pan to wire rack and brush bread with butter. Let cool for 10 minutes. Run knife around edge of pan to loosen bread. Slide bread onto wire rack, using spatula as needed for support. Let cool for 30 minutes before slicing. Serve warm.

On the Road More Than a Market

Every Saturday from mid-April to mid-November, you’ll find the sprawling Dane County Farmers’ Market in full swing around Capitol Square in downtown Madison, Wisconsin. What started as a ramshackle group of five farmers in 1972 (decades before farmers’ markets saturated urban centers everywhere) grew steadily over the years; it’s now 150 vendors strong. Farmers’ markets across the country still look to the Dane County model for inspiration.

The farmers, cheesemakers, beekeepers, and, of course, breadmakers—all local, all strictly vetted by the Madison Chamber of Commerce (it’s competitive to get into this market)—set up tents on the sidewalks surrounding a grassy patch of park by the towering capitol building at the center of town.

But this is more than just a pop-up venue for commerce. It’s a full-blown community happening that can attract upwards of 20,000 customers. They bring blankets to spread out on the grass, where they catch up over morning picnics of fresh seasonal fruit, coffee, breakfast sandwiches from food trucks, and freshly baked spicy cheese bread before making another pass through the market in search of goods to take home and transform into supper.

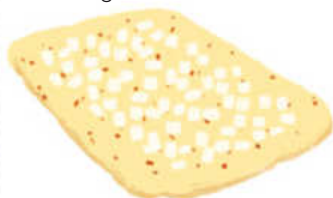
The early hum of “hellos” and “good mornings” eventually builds to a steady roar as the sun burns brighter. Crowds move elbow-to-elbow through the tidy rows of tents, eyes darting from piles of ruby radishes to baskets of shiny peppers, from plump stone fruits to gnarled, multicolored heirloom tomatoes.

Wisconsinites have an enthusiastic sense of humor, reflected in the signs put up to entice customers with important promises: “Grown in Real Dirt” and “No ‘Cides” (meaning herbicides, insecticides, or fungicides). But, this being a Saturday morning, one of the longest queues winds toward the potato doughnut stand, where the sign proclaims “Fried with Pure Lard.” —BRYAN ROOF



TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE Shaping Spicy Cheese Bread

Achieving an even distribution of spice and cheese takes careful shaping.



SPRINKLE FILLINGS

After rolling the dough into a rectangle, cover the surface with cheese cubes and red pepper flakes.



ROLL INTO LOG

Starting with the longer side, roll the dough into a tight cylinder, trapping the cheese cubes inside.



CREATE SPIRAL

Use gentle pressure to roll the dough log back and forth until it is 30 inches long. Then, create a spiral shape.



PLACE IN PAN

Nestle the spiral into a greased cake pan, cover it with a towel, and let the dough rise for 1 to 1½ hours.



ADD SPICE

Once the dough has doubled in size, brush the top with beaten egg and sprinkle it with red pepper flakes.

Coconut Shrimp

This Miami classic has devolved into bad bar food. We wanted to bring it back to life.

BY LEAH COLINS

COCONUT SHRIMP HAS an image problem. Too many dive bars serve prefab, dried-out, overcooked shrimp encased in soggy coatings. I wanted sweet, tender shrimp in crispy jackets with vivid coconut flavor.

I did some research into this South Florida favorite and tried a few existing recipes. Some used a simple batter with coconut stirred in, others a bound breading with added coconut. Some were baked, others shallow- or deep-fried. The results were disheartening: sandy breadings, flimsy coatings, rubbery shrimp. My only takeaway was that the deep-fried versions were best. Other than that, I'd have to start from scratch.

Most times, when we want to add a crunchy coating to chicken or fish, we start with a light flour dusting to absorb the meat's moisture, give the meat a quick dunk in beaten egg to create a glue, and press the pieces in bread crumbs. I took this route, adding unsweetened coconut shreds to the bread crumbs. The result? Shrimp with a sandy, not-very-coconutty coating.

For my next round, I kept the initial light flour dusting and then added beer and a bit of baking powder—two ingredients we often turn to for extra-crispy coatings—to the beaten egg. I pressed the shrimp into the bread-crumb mixture and fried them up.

My shrimp were crispy, to be sure, but while I could see the coconut shreds in the coating, I couldn't taste them. I went for broke with a three-pronged attack: One, I added a bit of coconut milk to the beer. Two, I upped the ratio of coconut flakes to bread crumbs to 2:1. And three, I switched from unsweetened coconut flakes to sweetened ones. For zing, I added 2 teaspoons of lime zest.

The flavor was there, but I had inconsistent crispiness and a coating that slid off. Was my oil temperature off? I tried higher temps, which burned the coconut, while low temps kept the coating from sticking. Oil heated to 350 degrees gave me the best results; frying the shrimp in three batches helped ensure that the oil maintained its temperature. For added insurance, I found that chilling the coated shrimp in the fridge for 20 minutes (or up to 2 hours) helped the coating stay on.

My tasters were happy munching

on these shrimp as-is, but I wanted a tropical dipping sauce to take them over the top—something bright and balanced. After experimenting with chili sauces and various chopped fruit sauces, I decided that vibrant mango was the way to go. I blended frozen mango chunks (a convenience that saved me the time-consuming step of cutting up fresh mango) with some peach preserves for sweetness and stability. Finally, a squeeze of lime juice and some minced cilantro, shallot, and jalapeño added a pop of freshness and mild heat.

COCONUT SHRIMP WITH MANGO DIPPING SAUCE

Serves 6 to 8

Be sure to gently press the coconut mixture into the shrimp to help it adhere. Frying the shrimp in 3 small batches ensures a consistent oil temperature and even browning. Zest the lime, reserving the zest for the shrimp breading, before juicing it for the sauce.

DIPPING SAUCE

- 6 ounces (¾ cup) frozen mango, thawed**
- ¼ cup peach preserves**
- 2 tablespoons lime juice**
- Salt and pepper**
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh cilantro**
- 2 teaspoons minced shallot**
- 2 teaspoons minced jalapeño chile**

SHRIMP

- 1⅓ cups all-purpose flour**
- 2 cups sweetened shredded coconut**
- 1 cup panko bread crumbs**
- 2 teaspoons grated lime zest**
- Salt and pepper**
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder**
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- ½ cup mild lager, such as Budweiser**
- ¼ cup canned coconut milk**
- 1 large egg**
- 1½ pounds extra-large shrimp (21 to 25 per pound), peeled and deveined**
- 3 quarts peanut or vegetable oil**

1. FOR THE DIPPING SAUCE: Process mango, preserves, lime juice, pinch salt, and pinch pepper in blender until completely smooth, about 1 minute, scraping down sides of blender jar as needed. Transfer to bowl and stir in cilantro, shallot, and jalapeño. Season with salt and pepper to taste; set aside.

2. FOR THE SHRIMP: Adjust oven



Sweetened flakes were one key to amped-up coconut flavor. Coconut milk was another.

rack to middle position and heat oven to 200 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Set wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet and line with triple layer of paper towels.

3. Spread ⅔ cup flour in shallow dish. Combine coconut, panko, lime zest, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper in second shallow dish. Whisk baking powder, cayenne, and remaining ⅓ cup flour together in medium bowl; then whisk in lager, coconut milk, and egg until fully incorporated and smooth.

4. Pat shrimp dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. One at a time, dredge shrimp in flour, shaking off excess; dip into beer batter, letting excess drip back into bowl; then coat with coconut-panko mixture, pressing

gently to adhere. Arrange breaded shrimp on parchment-lined sheet. Refrigerate for at least 20 minutes or up to 2 hours.

5. Add oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 2 inches deep and heat over medium-high heat to 350 degrees. Add one-third of shrimp, 1 at a time, to hot oil. Fry, stirring gently to prevent pieces from sticking together, until shrimp are golden brown, 1½ to 2 minutes. Adjust burner as necessary to maintain oil temperature between 325 and 350 degrees.

6. Transfer shrimp to prepared wire rack and place in oven to keep warm. Return oil to 350 degrees and repeat in 2 more batches with remaining shrimp. Serve with dipping sauce.



Almond Boneless Chicken

You may find this dish in Chinese restaurants, but it was definitely born in the U.S.A.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

ALMOND BONELESS CHICKEN consists of boneless chicken breasts pounded thin, dipped in batter, and deep-fried; the chicken is sliced and served on a bed of iceberg lettuce with a mild brown sauce and a sprinkling of almonds and scallions. Also known as ABC, it's a Chinese American staple on restaurant menus in the Detroit region, and almost nowhere else. I wanted to change that.

I recruited a few native Michiganders to act as consultants. They confirmed that the dish, though mild in flavor, is a riot of textures: crunchy iceberg lettuce, crispy battered chicken, velvety sauce.

I found a few existing recipes, all of which used a batter made with egg, water, flour, and cornstarch, plus a leavening agent like baking soda or powder, in varying amounts. One thick batter puffed up like a doughnut as it fried. A thinner batter produced a coating that wasn't crispy enough. I turned to an ingredient we often use in coatings: beer. It added a welcome flavor, and its carbonation lightened the batter. To further enhance the crunch, I battered the chicken first and then dredged it in extra flour; the shaggy bits left by the flour fried up extra-crispy.

With the chicken settled, I turned to the sauce. I was intrigued by recipes that included stir-fry staples like bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, and ginger, but my expert tasters scoffed. "That's not ABC," I was told. They said the sauce

should be a chicken-stock base thickened with cornstarch and scant else. I compromised, enhancing my version with soy sauce, dry sherry, and flavorful hoisin to add sweetness and depth.

One nagging issue was the almonds. Every recipe I found sprinkled chopped almonds over the chicken, but I wanted the nuts incorporated more deeply. I took a decided liberty and added a few toasted and chopped almonds to the batter. The almond flavor was much more pronounced. My tasters, even the purists, called it an improvement.

ALMOND BONELESS CHICKEN

Serves 4 to 6

Use a Dutch oven that holds 6 quarts or more. Choose a mild lager or pilsner for this recipe. In addition to iceberg lettuce, this dish is usually served with rice.

SAUCE

- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon cold water
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 teaspoons dry sherry
- 2 teaspoons hoisin sauce
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- 1/8 teaspoon salt

CHICKEN

- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 1/2 cup sliced almonds, toasted
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 1/4 cups lager or pilsner beer
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 2 quarts peanut or vegetable oil
- 1/2 head iceberg lettuce (4 1/2 ounces), cored and sliced thin crosswise
- 3 scallions, sliced thin on bias

1. FOR THE SAUCE: Dissolve cornstarch in water in small bowl and set aside. Combine broth, sherry, hoisin, soy sauce, and salt in small saucepan and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Whisk in reserved cornstarch mixture, return to boil, and cook until thickened, about 30 seconds. Remove from heat, cover, and keep warm, stirring occasionally.

2. FOR THE CHICKEN: Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Set



This crunchy fried chicken is served over crisp shredded iceberg lettuce.

wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet and line rack with triple layer of paper towels. Halve chicken breasts horizontally to form 8 cutlets. Pat cutlets dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

3. Finely chop 1/4 cup almonds. Whisk chopped almonds, 1 cup flour, cornstarch, garlic powder, baking powder, baking soda, 1 teaspoon salt, and 3/4 teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Whisk in beer and egg. Combine remaining 1 cup flour and 1 teaspoon salt in shallow dish.

4. Working with 1 at a time, dip cutlets into batter to thoroughly coat, letting excess drip back into bowl. Dredge battered cutlets in flour to coat, shaking off excess, and place on parchment-lined

sheet. Let cutlets sit while oil heats.

5. Add oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 1 1/2 inches deep and heat over medium-high heat to 350 degrees. Working in batches, add half of cutlets to hot oil. Adjust burner as necessary to maintain oil temperature between 325 and 350 degrees. Fry, stirring gently to prevent pieces from sticking together, until cutlets are golden and register 160 degrees, about 4 minutes, flipping halfway through frying. Transfer to prepared wire rack to cool while frying remaining cutlets.

6. Place lettuce on platter. Cut each cutlet crosswise into 1/2-inch-thick slices. Arrange slices over lettuce and drizzle with sauce. Sprinkle with scallions and remaining 1/4 cup almonds. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN TIP

Cool Oil, Uncool Chicken

To achieve the perfect golden exterior, it's essential to have the cooking oil at the correct temperature—350 degrees. Adding too many pieces to the pot will drop the oil's temperature, producing pale, greasy chicken.



PALE FAIL

An overcrowded pot leads to under-browned, unappetizing chicken.

Cooking Class Herb Roast Chicken

Merely stuffing a chicken with herbs delivers zero herb flavor. Our triple-pronged approach produces perfectly cooked meat, crispy skin, and a savory sauce, all with fresh herb flavor. **BY CHRISTIE MORRISON**



HERB ROAST CHICKEN Serves 4

The test kitchen's favorite whole chickens are Mary's Free Range Air Chilled Chicken (also sold as Pitman's) and Bell & Evans Air Chilled Premium Fresh Chicken. Note that after the herb paste is applied, the chicken needs to rest for at least 1 hour (and up to 24 hours) before cooking.

- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1½ teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 (3½- to 4-pound) whole chicken, giblets discarded
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 3 tablespoons white wine
- 1½ teaspoons cornstarch dissolved in 1 tablespoon cold water
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, chilled

1. Process parsley, thyme, rosemary, garlic, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in food processor until paste forms, about 20 seconds, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Combine 1 tablespoon herb paste with oil in small bowl. Reserve another ½ teaspoon herb paste for sauce in separate bowl. Set aside remaining herb paste for rubbing under skin of chicken.

2. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Using your fingers, gently loosen skin covering breast and thighs, being careful

not to tear skin. Using small spoon, spread remaining herb paste under skin, directly on meat. Rub herb-oil mixture all over exterior of chicken. Tuck wings behind back and tie legs together with kitchen twine. Transfer chicken to plate. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees.

3. Place V-rack in large roasting pan and spray with vegetable oil spray. Set chicken, breast side down, on V-rack. Roast until thighs register 135 to 140 degrees, 35 to 40 minutes. Remove pan from oven and, using wads of paper towels, flip chicken breast side up. Pour 2 cups water into bottom of roasting pan. Return pan to oven and roast until thighs register 175 degrees, 20 to 25 minutes. Transfer chicken to carving board and let rest for 20 minutes.

4. Carefully pour liquid in roasting pan into fat separator. Transfer ½ cup defatted pan juices to medium saucepan. Add broth and wine and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until sauce is slightly thickened and reduced to 1 cup, 8 to 10 minutes. Whisk in cornstarch mixture and simmer until thickened, about 2 minutes. Off heat, whisk in butter and reserved ½ teaspoon herb paste. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Carve chicken and serve with sauce.

Good to Know

TEST KITCHEN TIPS FOR ANY ROAST CHICKEN

Getting Herbs Under the Skin

Chicken skin is like a raincoat: It's an effective barrier, keeping what's outside out and what's inside in. The best way to maximize seasoning and herb flavor inside the skin and keep it there is to separate the skin from the meat—without creating tears or holes—to create space for the herb paste. Your best tool is your fingers. Carefully slide them under the skin from the cavity side and sweep them back and forth to loosen the skin. Next, do the same from the neck side, creating a pocket that goes all the way through. Once the skin is separated from the meat, gently spoon in the herb paste, being careful not to tear the skin.



Use Hearty Herbs

Flavorful herbs like rosemary and thyme retain their deep flavor and color better than more delicate herbs like chervil, chives, or basil.

Don't Toss the Carcass

There's a wealth of flavor in those bones. After removing the meat from your chicken, wrap the carcass and bones in plastic and freeze them to use for stock later. We use 2½ pounds of chicken bones for our favorite Slow-Cooker Chicken Stock recipe: CooksCountry.com/slowcookerstock.



Our Favorite Roasting Pan

We're fans of the Calphalon Contemporary Stainless Roasting Pan with Rack for its sturdy construction, even heating, and secure handles—which are so roomy that you can carry the heavy pan around comfortably, even while wearing potholders.



1. MAKE HERB PASTE

Process the parsley, thyme, rosemary, garlic, salt, and pepper into a paste that's easy to spread evenly both underneath and over the skin.



2. SEASON UNDER SKIN

Use your fingers to spread the herb paste under the skin, in direct contact with the meat. The salt in the paste will season the meat and keep it juicy.



3. COAT OUTSIDE

Combine the herb paste with the olive oil and rub it evenly over the exterior of the chicken. The oil helps brown the skin and boost herb flavor.



4. TUCK AND TIE

Tuck the wings behind the back to keep them from burning, and tie the legs together with twine to help them cook evenly and make the bird easier to flip.



5. LET IT CHILL

Cover the chicken with plastic wrap and refrigerate it for at least 1 hour or up to 24 hours to allow the salt in the paste to penetrate the meat.



6. ELEVATE CHICKEN

Place the chicken breast side down on a V-rack set inside a large roasting pan to ensure even cooking. Starting breast side down helps retain moisture.



7. TURN IT OVER

After 40 minutes, use paper towels to flip the chicken. This helps keep the white meat from drying out before the dark meat is done and the skin is browned.



8. ADD WATER

After flipping the chicken, pour 2 cups of water into the pan and return it to the oven. The water keeps any drippings from burning and imparting off-flavors.



9. SEPARATE FAT

Pour the liquid from the roasting pan into a fat separator. Reserve ½ cup of defatted liquid and discard the excess fat to keep the sauce from being too greasy.



10. MAKE SAUCE

Combine the broth, wine, and defatted pan juices in a saucepan, and reduce the mixture. Whisk in cornstarch to thicken and finish with butter and seasonings.



11. LET BIRD REST

Let the bird rest for at least 20 minutes before carving. This helps it retain its juices and stay moist. Don't worry: The bird will still be warm.



12. REMOVE LEG QUARTER

After the 20-minute rest, start carving by cutting into the bird where the leg meets the breast.



13. SEPARATE LEG JOINT

Pull the leg quarter away from the chicken to expose the joint. Push the knife down into and through the joint to separate the leg.



14. DIVIDE DRUMSTICK AND THIGH

Cut through the joint that connects the drumstick to the thigh to separate them. Repeat steps 12 through 14 on the second leg.



15. REMOVE BREAST

Cut down along the side of the breast-bone, pulling the meat away as you cut. Repeat on the second side.



16. SLICE BREAST MEAT

Remove the wing by cutting through the joint. Cut the breast crosswise into 1-inch slices. Repeat with the second breast.



One-Pan Dinner Baked Ziti with Sausage and Spinach

Baked ziti usually requires at least three pots and pans. Wouldn't just one pot be better? BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

THERE'S JUST SO much to love about a big, family-size pot of baked ziti: tender pasta, vibrant tomato sauce, oozy pockets of mozzarella, and dollops of creamy, bubbling ricotta.

But it's a project that can quickly spiral out of control: multiple components, numerous pots and pans, a great deal of time and attention, and endless opportunities for things to go south. It's hardly a weeknight kind of meal.

But shouldn't it be? What better way to take the edge off a Monday than this comforting dish? Determined to find out, I armed myself with a single Dutch oven and a big bag of ziti and hit the stove.

A great baked pasta dish lives or dies by its sauce. After creating many iterations over the years in the test kitchen, we know that our favorite baked pasta recipes start with a slow-cooked tomato sauce—we love the fresh, intense flavor that only homemade sauce can provide. Unfortunately, these sauces can take ages to achieve. I wanted the same impact in much less time.

I started with a can of tomato sauce (a convenience product that also includes onion, garlic, salt, and other flavorful ingredients), brightened up with the sharper flavor of canned diced tomatoes (our favorite brand is Hunt's Diced Tomatoes). A few pantry staples—garlic, dried oregano, and red pepper flakes—added complexity and a little heat, while just ½ teaspoon of granulated sugar tempered the tomatoes' acidity. Some fresh basil added a vibrant note, one that stood up even as the sauce simmered and thickened slightly on the stovetop.

Normally, at this point, I'd be waiting for water to boil in a separate pot, in which I'd cook the pasta to al dente before stirring it into the sauce. But I was committed to using just one pot for this entire recipe, so I decided to cook the ziti directly in the sauce I'd just made. I'd need to add a bit of water to make certain that the ziti had enough liquid to stay submerged and cook evenly, but not so much that it left the finished dish too watered down. Two cups straight from the tap proved just the right amount.

But while cooking the pasta directly in the sauce saved me from dirtying another pot (not to mention a colander, since I didn't have to drain it), it also presented me with a problem: cooking time. When I followed the instructions on the pasta box and cooked my pasta in the sauce until "done" before stirring in the cheese and baking it off in the oven, I ended up with mouthfuls of overcooked, mushy, definitely-not-al-dente ziti by the time the dish was finished. So I backed off a bit on the timing, letting the pasta simmer in the bubbling sauce until it had just begun to soften but was still raw in the center, about 7 minutes.

Time for the fun part: cheese. The best baked zitis use a medley of cheeses for maximum meltability, a range of texture, and deep flavor. The most popular combinations include stringy mozzarella, creamy ricotta, and savory Parmesan. It's hard to beat this tried-and-true trifecta, so I decided to stick with it. After a few rounds of stirring and melting various combinations of these



The sausage and spinach make this rich, hearty dish a complete meal.

cheeses in various stages of the process, I determined that the best route to ample but not overwhelming cheesiness was to stir ¾ cup of cubed mozzarella and ½ cup of shredded Parmesan directly into the pasta after its initial 7-minute cook time and then top the dish with dollops of ricotta and more mozzarella and Parmesan to melt and brown in the oven.

This quick baked ziti was certainly a one-pot pasta, but without vegetables or meat, it didn't quite qualify as a one-pot meal. Starting the sauce by browning some Italian sausage for a meaty base was easy, and its inclusion added both a hit of protein and some more complex flavors.

Incorporating a vegetable took a little more finesse. We vetoed zucchini

and mushrooms, because they upset the moisture balance and took too long to cook through. Instead, I began experimenting with spinach. I started by taking the easiest route—frozen spinach—but it turned a sad, unappealing shade of green in the pot. Chopped curly spinach stayed firm and vibrantly green, and so did roughly chopped baby spinach. I stuck with the baby leaves for their convenience. Stirring them into the pasta with the cheese worked perfectly and rounded out the meal with a healthful, easy green vegetable.

A final sprinkle of chopped fresh basil over the bubbling brown cheese finished this dinner in a pot. Now came the hard part: waiting for it to cool down enough to safely dig in.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

Saucy Solution

Rather than boil the pasta in a separate pot of salty water, we added dried ziti directly to the simmering tomato sauce to cook. To ensure all the pasta is fully submerged, we also added 2 cups of water to the mix. We took care to remove the pot from the heat before the pasta was completely done, because the pot went back to the oven to broil after the cheese and spinach were stirred in. If the pasta were fully cooked before this final step, it would end up mushy.





Slow Cooker Chicken and Rice Soup

ONE-POT BAKED ZITI WITH SAUSAGE AND SPINACH

Serves 4 to 6

You can substitute part-skim versions of ricotta and mozzarella cheese here. Avoid preshredded cheese, as it does not melt well.

- 8 ounces sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (28-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- ⅛ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 cups water
- 12 ounces (3¾ cups) ziti
- 6 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 7 ounces (7 cups) baby spinach, chopped coarse
- 6 ounces whole-milk mozzarella cheese, cut into ¼-inch pieces (1½ cups)
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)
- 8 ounces (1 cup) whole-milk ricotta cheese

1. Cook sausage in Dutch oven over medium-high heat, breaking up pieces with spoon, until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomato sauce, diced tomatoes and their juice, salt, oregano, sugar, and pepper flakes. Bring mixture to boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer until thickened, about 10 minutes.

2. Stir in water, pasta, and 4 tablespoons basil. Increase heat to high and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer vigorously, uncovered, until pasta is still very firm but just starting to soften, 6 to 8 minutes, stirring frequently. Adjust oven rack 8 inches from broiler element and heat broiler.

3. Remove pot from heat and stir in spinach, ¾ cup mozzarella, and ½ cup Parmesan. Dollop surface of pasta evenly with spoonfuls of ricotta. Top with remaining ¾ cup mozzarella and ½ cup Parmesan.

4. Broil ziti until cheese is bubbling and beginning to brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer to wire rack and let cool for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons basil and serve.

We were surprised to find that the big problem here was the rice, which either blew apart or stayed chewy—or both—in every batch of soup. BY CECILIA JENKINS

CHICKEN AND RICE soup seems like a natural for the slow cooker: Just brown some chicken and vegetables, dump them into the insert with broth and rice, and walk away. If only life were that easy.

I made several slow-cooker recipes for this classic soup, and all were surprisingly bad. Most featured weak chicken flavor, but the big problem was the rice, which was half disintegrated and yet somehow still too chewy and wholly unpleasant. There was nowhere to go but up.

I decided I'd make a great chicken soup first and then figure out how best to add the rice. I knew that using bone-in chicken pieces would be the way to go, as pieces are easier to manage than a whole bird and the bones add flavor and body to the broth. For ease—and because my tasters asked for dark meat—I chose bone-in thighs. Quickly searing them in a skillet built a nice bit of fond—those little bits of concentrated flavor on the bottom of the skillet. After I softened onions, carrots, and celery in the skillet, I deglazed the pan with white wine to incorporate the fond into the soup and put everything in the cooker with store-bought chicken broth. After 3 hours on low, I removed the chicken pieces, let them cool a bit, shredded the meat, and added it back to the soup. Just a little soy sauce upped the meaty flavor and seasoning, and a bay leaf lent an herbal note. This was good soup.

On to the rice. Having determined that 1½ cups of long-grain white rice was the best amount, I tested various cooking times from 15 minutes to 2½ hours. But every time, the rice was either blown apart, mushy, or too chewy. Sometimes it was all three. I tried toasting the rice in oil and butter before adding it—didn't work. I tried medium- and short-grain rice, wild rice, and even brown rice at different intervals. No luck: The slow cooker never generated enough heat to cook it properly.

I realized there was another category of rice that I hadn't considered: converted rice. Converted rice has two forms: instant (or quick-cooking) rice and "ready" rice. Instant rice is fissured to speed the infiltration of hot water and then dried—it really just needs to be rehydrated. Ready rice is cooked



A tablespoon each of soy sauce and fresh lemon juice give the broth backbone and brightness.

until almost done and then coated in oil to help preserve its shape. The instant rice was the big winner here, warming through and soaking up the savory chicken broth in about 10 minutes.

SLOW-COOKER CHICKEN AND RICE SOUP Serves 6 to 8

The test kitchen prefers Minute brand instant rice.

- 6 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs
- Salt and pepper
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into ¼-inch pieces
- 2 celery ribs, chopped
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 7 cups chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 bay leaf
- 1½ cups instant white rice
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

1. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add chicken, skin side down, and cook until well browned, 7 to 9 minutes. Transfer chicken to slow cooker.

2. Add onion, carrots, celery, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper to now-empty skillet and reduce heat to medium. Cook until just softened, about 5 minutes. Add thyme and cook until fragrant, 30 seconds. Stir in wine, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until nearly evaporated, about 1 minute. Transfer mixture to slow cooker. Add broth, soy sauce, and bay leaf.

3. Cover and cook until chicken is tender, about 2 hours on high or 3 hours on low. Transfer chicken to carving board and let cool slightly, then discard skin. Using 2 forks, shred chicken into bite-size pieces. Discard bones and bay leaf.

4. Stir rice into soup. Cover and cook until tender, about 8 minutes on high or 15 minutes on low. Stir in parsley, lemon juice, and shredded chicken. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.



Cooking for Two Herb-Crusted Beef Tenderloin

We brought the fancy steakhouse steak home—and left the pricey tab at the restaurant. BY ASHLEY MOORE

WITH A LITTLE KNOW-HOW, most home cooks can purchase and cook a beautiful basic steak that measures up to steakhouse quality—and for a lot less money. But what about a more involved steakhouse preparation, like a tender filet mignon punched up with a crunchy, buttery herb crust? (Filet mignon, for all of its textural virtues, is a mild-tasting cut that benefits from a flavor boost.) I wanted to develop a recipe for this dish that was up to—or even better than—steakhouse standards but would be easy enough for a special weeknight dinner for two at home.

The test kitchen has a fantastic, show-stopping recipe for Herb-Crusted Beef Tenderloin that serves 10 to 12 people, so I figured I'd start there and downsize. That recipe calls for trimming and rubbing a 5-pound beef tenderloin with salt, pepper, and sugar and letting it sit at room temperature for 2 hours so the salt can penetrate and deeply season the hulking mass of meat. The meat roasts for 20 minutes before being coated with a potent herb paste and bread crumbs and returned to the oven to reach a perfect medium-rare.

I decided right away that the most logical cut for my “for-two” version would be two hefty, center-cut filets mignons, which are cut from the tenderloin—same cut, smaller size. And since I wouldn't be slicing the steaks (as you do with a roast), it made the most sense to pile the herb paste and bread crumbs right on



Our potent herb paste and crunchy panko crumbs take tenderloin over the top.

top of them. The herb paste—Parmesan cheese, chopped parsley, olive oil, minced garlic, thyme, salt, and pepper—was easy enough to scale down to the right amount to top two portions. But when I started doing the math to scale

down the homemade bread crumbs, I realized I'd only need half a slice of bread. I opted to use panko crumbs instead.

As for the cooking, I knew these gorgeous steaks needed a perfect sear to do them justice. I seasoned the steaks with salt and pepper and browned them in oil in a hot skillet for about 3 minutes on each side; at this stage the outsides of the steaks had a nice sear, but the meat still needed more cooking. I smeared on the herb paste and then the crumbs and popped the skillet into a hot oven for 15 minutes, until the steaks hit 125 degrees for a perfect medium-rare.

Except they weren't perfect—the residual heat in the skillet caused the bottoms of the steaks to overcook. The cooking was much more even when I transferred the seared steaks from the skillet to a wire rack set inside a rimmed baking sheet for their stint in the oven. This move ensured that the oven's heat would circulate evenly around the meat, thereby keeping the steaks from overcooking.

For one final test, I tried salting the steaks and letting them sit for a bit before cooking (a trick we often use for moist, deeply seasoned meat) but procrastinators will be happy to know that this extra step proved unnecessary—my filets were perfect already.

HERB-CRUSTED BEEF TENDERLOIN FOR TWO

Tie butcher's twine around the exterior of the steaks to keep them intact while cooking. Remove the twine before serving.

- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup)
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- Salt and pepper
- 2 (6- to 8-ounce) center-cut filets mignons, 1½ to 2 inches thick, trimmed
- ¼ cup panko bread crumbs

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet. Process Parmesan, parsley, 3 tablespoons oil, garlic, thyme, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in food processor until smooth paste forms, about 10 seconds, scraping down bowl as needed; set aside.

2. Pat steaks dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Tie butcher's twine around middle of steaks. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook steaks until well browned on both sides, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer steaks to prepared rack. Spread 2 tablespoons herb paste on top of each steak, then top each with 2 tablespoons panko, pressing gently to adhere.

3. Roast until meat registers 120 to 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 14 to 16 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through cooking. Let steaks cool on wire rack for 5 minutes. Remove twine and serve.

KEY STEPS To Perfect Tenderloin Steaks


It requires a bit of technique to get the most out of mild beef tenderloin.



1. TIE Use butcher's twine to secure and support both steaks around the middle. Tying the steaks this way helps them cook evenly.



2. SEAR Get the oil nice and hot in a skillet and brown the steaks well on both sides to build flavor. Then, transfer them to a rack in the oven to finish cooking.

 Cooking for a larger group? Our recipe for a full herb-crusted tenderloin serves 12. CooksCountry.com/herbtenderloin.



Five Easy Recipes Loaded-Up Oatmeal

No more instant packets. We wanted homemade oatmeal with fresh stir-ins and minimal morning fuss. BY CECILIA JENKINS

THE CHOICE BETWEEN A bowl of creamy, plump, pleasantly chewy slow-cooked steel-cut oatmeal and the gummy stuff you get from those just-add-water instant packets is a no-brainer—as long as someone else is doing the cooking. But too often, speed trumps quality. I set out to create a recipe for the far superior steel-cut oatmeal with easy flavor variations that was, if not instant, at least quicker.

Convenience varieties of oats are processed in ways that speed cooking; old-fashioned or rolled oats are flattened between rollers to allow them to more quickly absorb hot water, while quick-cooking and instant oats are also steamed, toasted, and cut smaller to hasten cooking time even more. The only processing steel-cut oats go through, on the other hand, is being cut into small pieces.

Cooking steel-cut oats typically requires a long, slow simmer in boiling water, with near-constant stirring, after which they achieve their signature toothsome pop. But I knew that I had to shave off some time—a few minutes at least—if I had any hope of welcoming these into my morning routine. And while we've had great success soaking oatmeal overnight in the past, I frequently forget this step the night before.

Consulting past test kitchen experiments led me to a technique we use for rice pilaf, in which the grains are coated in fat and toasted before hitting the water. I tried it with oats, toasting them with butter, and was rewarded with a toasty, buttery flavor. What's more, it jump-started the cooking process—no small thing for a morning recipe.

I added 4 cups of room-temperature water (experiments with boiling water showed that it didn't cut the cooking time) and let it simmer until thick and creamy, about 20 minutes. A bit of salt seasoned them just enough.

Time for some stir-ins. The classic combination of cinnamon, brown sugar, and raisins was a natural. Other favorites: a bananas Foster-esque mix of dark brown sugar and chopped bananas; a sweet spin on a PB&J profile with almond butter, sliced almonds, and blueberries; a peaches and "cream" version with a bit of milk in the cooking liquid, plus thawed frozen peaches, honey, and vanilla; and a tropical variation with coconut milk and toasted flaked coconut.



Above, peaches and "cream" oatmeal made with whole milk. Below, clockwise from top left: blueberry and almond, toasted coconut, raisin and brown sugar, and banana and brown sugar.



RAISIN AND BROWN SUGAR OATMEAL

Serves 4

Do not substitute old-fashioned rolled oats in this recipe; the resulting oatmeal will be gummy. The oatmeal will continue to thicken as it cools, so it is best served hot.

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 cup steel-cut oats
- 4 cups water
- Salt
- ½ cup raisins
- 3 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. Melt butter in large saucepan over medium heat. Add oats and toast, stirring constantly, until fragrant and golden, about 2 minutes.

2. Add water and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer gently, stirring occasionally to avoid scorching, until mixture is creamy and oats are tender but chewy, about 20 minutes.

3. Off heat, stir in ¼ teaspoon salt, cover, and let stand for 5 minutes. Stir in raisins, sugar, and cinnamon. Season with salt to taste. Serve immediately.

BANANA AND BROWN SUGAR OATMEAL

Substitute 2 chopped ripe bananas for raisins, 2 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar for light brown sugar, and 1 tablespoon unsalted butter for cinnamon.

BLUEBERRY AND ALMOND OATMEAL

Substitute blueberries for raisins and 2 tablespoons almond butter for cinnamon. Add ½ cup toasted sliced almonds with blueberries and almond butter.

PEACHES AND "CREAM" OATMEAL

Reduce water to 3 cups and add ½ cup whole milk. Substitute thawed, patted dry, and chopped frozen peaches for raisins; honey for sugar; and ½ teaspoon vanilla extract for cinnamon.

TOASTED COCONUT OATMEAL

Reduce water to 3 cups and add 1 cup canned coconut milk. Substitute toasted unsweetened flaked coconut for raisins and omit cinnamon.

Equipment Review Small Food Processors

We love our winning food processor, but it's big and costs nearly \$200. Could we find a cheaper, smaller model that still aces basic tasks? BY HANNAH CROWLEY

OWNING A GOOD food processor is like having a little motorized sous chef living in your cabinet. We use ours regularly to grate cheese, grind bread crumbs, chop nuts, blend soups, prep vegetables, and mix doughs for pizza, bread, cookies, and pie.

While we consider ours indispensable, standard food processors tend to be big and pricey. Smaller processors are a good choice for budget- or space-conscious cooks or for those who want to dip a toe in the processor pond before shelling out nearly \$200.

We took a fresh look at the small food processors market to find the most versatile, efficient, and well-designed model. Options ran the gamut from chintzy choppers to miniature versions of full-sized models from major brands. They ranged from 1.5 to 6 cups in capacity (compared to 11 to 16 cups for larger models), but we wanted something that could cut and blend. So we saved the small, basic choppers for later and zeroed in on 3- to 6-cup models, of which we found seven, priced from \$27.99 to \$99.99. We put the processors through their paces: mincing garlic; dicing celery, onions, and carrots; grating Parmesan cheese; chopping almonds; and making mayonnaise, pesto, and hummus.

Size was an important factor: 3.5- and 4-cup models were ideal. They were compact yet large enough to handle a range of projects.

A few of the machines ran fast, which made it easy to overprocess. Others didn't have enough oomph—their hummus and pesto never got completely smooth and were deemed "rustic" by tasters. Powerful-yet-responsive controls were optimal.

Feeding tubes are essential for making mayonnaise in a food processor: The oil has to be added slowly to properly

emulsify with the other ingredients. Four models didn't have feeding tubes; of the three that did, two made smooth, fluffy mayonnaise. The sole model with a feeding tube that still failed to make mayonnaise brings us to our final factor: the blade.

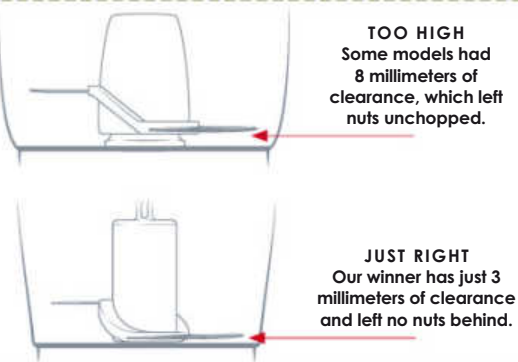
This model's egg yolks fell below its blade, so the ingredients couldn't emulsify; two other processors suffered a similar problem. Whole garlic cloves, almonds, and pine nuts remained stranded under their blades because they spun 5 to 8 millimeters above the bottom of the bowl and couldn't reach the food. Low blades with just 3 to 4 millimeters of clearance made better, more evenly processed food. Sharp, straight blades were also important; serrated blades chewed up food, while straight blades made crisp, clean cuts.

There are downsides to smaller processors. First, they can't handle doughs well; their workbowls are too small and their motors too weak. Second, they're not efficient for large-quantity prep—they don't have grating or slicing blades, and their smaller workbowls maxed out at about 2 cups of vegetables.

But a good small food processor can excel at mayonnaises, dressings, dips, marinades, and sauces—projects that would otherwise require serious muscle or a food mill. They can also handle smaller-quantity mincing, grinding, and dicing. If money or space is limited, you prefer a knife for prep, you only plan to do smaller projects, or you want to try a smaller and cheaper food processor before investing in a large model, the Cuisinart Elite Collection 4-Cup Chopper/Grinder—at half the size and less than a third of the price of our winning full-sized machine (also made by Cuisinart)—is the best small food processor on the market.

KEY FACTOR Blade Position

A great food processor chops food into morsels of a consistent size. When there's too much space between the bottom blade and the base of the bowl, nuts and garlic cloves get trapped underneath and remain unchopped.



TOO HIGH
Some models had 8 millimeters of clearance, which left nuts unchopped.

JUST RIGHT
Our winner has just 3 millimeters of clearance and left no nuts behind.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED		CRITERIA	TESTERS' NOTES
CUISINART Elite Collection 4-Cup Chopper/Grinder Model: CH-4DC Price: \$59.95 Blade Height from Bottom: 3 mm Capacity: 4 cups		Mincing	★★★★
		Dicing	★★★★
		Grating	★★★★
		Chopping	★★★★
		Emulsifying	★★★★
		Blending	★★★★
		Cleanup	★★★★
BLACK+DECKER Glass Bowl Chopper Model: EHC3002R Price: \$34.95 Blade Height from Bottom: 18 mm Capacity: 4 cups		Mincing	★★
		Dicing	★★★★
		Grating	★★½
		Chopping	★★★★
		Emulsifying	0
		Blending	★★
		Cleanup	★★★★
KITCHENAID 3.5 Cup Food Chopper Model: KFC3511OB Price: \$49.99 Blade Height from Bottom: 4 mm Capacity: 3.5 cups		Mincing	★
		Dicing	★★½
		Grating	★★
		Chopping	★★½
		Emulsifying	★★★★
		Blending	★★
		Cleanup	★★
HAMILTON BEACH Stack & Press 3 Cup Glass Bowl Chopper Model: 72860 Price: \$29.99 Blade Height from Bottom: 4 mm Capacity: 3 cups		Mincing	★★
		Dicing	★
		Grating	★★★★
		Chopping	★★
		Emulsifying	0
		Blending	★★
		Cleanup	★★★★
NUTRI NINJA 2-in-1 Model: QB3000 Price: \$99.99 Blade Height from Bottom: 6 mm Capacity: 5 cups		Mincing	★★
		Dicing	★★
		Grating	★★
		Chopping	★★
		Emulsifying	0
		Blending	★★
		Cleanup	★★½
PROCTOR SILEX 6 Cup Food Processor Model: 70452A Price: \$34.99 Blade Height from Bottom: 8 mm Capacity: 6 cups		Mincing	★
		Dicing	★★★★
		Grating	★★
		Chopping	★★
		Emulsifying	0
		Blending	★
		Cleanup	★★★★
BRENTWOOD 3-cup Food Processor Model: FP-546 (white) Price: \$27.99 Blade Height from Bottom: 8 mm Capacity: 3 cups		Mincing	★
		Dicing	★
		Grating	★★
		Chopping	★★½
		Emulsifying	0
		Blending	★
		Cleanup	★★

Taste Test Baking Powder

We always assumed all baking powders were created equal.

Boy, were we wrong. BY LAUREN SAVOIE

FOR SUCH AN indispensable ingredient, leavening remains an afterthought to most home bakers. But it's undoubtedly essential: Without the transformative powers of leavening, many baked goods would emerge from the oven dense, flat, or hard.

Most leaveners work on the same principle: When added to a batter or dough, they release gas, creating air bubbles that lift the mixture. The most familiar natural leavener is yeast, which consumes the sugars in a dough and produces air bubbles. Resilient doughs, like bread doughs, are elastic and can contain gas bubbles for a relatively long period. Quick bread doughs and runny cake batters can't hold gas bubbles for long, so when making these, we rely on fast-acting chemical leaveners.

There are two commonly available chemical leaveners, baking soda and baking powder. Baking soda is a single-ingredient product, whereas baking powder is a mix, combining baking soda with a powdered acid and a starch (see "What's the Difference?").

But the mix isn't always the same from brand to brand. Since different combinations of ingredients are used in different brands of baking powder, we rounded up six nationally available products and had 21 America's Test Kitchen staff members assess them in white cake, chocolate crinkle cookies, and cream biscuits.

To keep everything consistent, we carefully measured all the ingredients and baked the cakes in the same oven, one after another. When we lined up the cooled cakes side by side, we were astounded at the differences. Some cakes were tall and airy, while others were dense and squat. The thickness of the cakes varied by up to 20 percent—from 0.89 inch to 1.24 inches—and tasters preferred the delicate, tender crumb of taller cakes. (We baked the cakes three more times, always using freshly opened baking powders, and the results were the same.) What was going on?

Modern baking powders are "double acting," meaning they release some of their carbon dioxide when moistened and the rest when heated. (True "single-acting" baking powders, by contrast, release all their gas when mixed with liquid and are rarely manufactured anymore.) Although all the baking powders we tested release approximately the same total amount of

carbon dioxide gas, brands vary widely in the ratio released at room temperature versus at higher temperatures in the oven. This is important: If too much gas is released at room temperature, cakes won't bake up tall and airy in the oven.

To get a better idea of the composition of each baking powder, we scrutinized ingredient labels and talked to manufacturers. We learned that the two densest and squattest cakes were made with baking powders that use just one acid, while stronger-performing brands have two forms of acid to bolster lift. Baking powders with just one acid create only 30 percent of their lift in the oven. By contrast, brands with two acids produce 60 to 90 percent of their lift in the oven and create baked goods that are airier, fluffier, and more tender.

But fluffier isn't better in every application: Lower-rising baking powders actually made moister and chewier cookies. Brands that performed best in cake made cookies that were just a little too fluffy and cake-like. This wasn't enough to drop these powders from the top of our rankings, but it did push them from the top spot: We were looking for a great all-purpose baking powder, after all. (Don't worry, our winning baking powder still produces a tall, fluffy cake.)

Finally, since tasters didn't notice flavor differences in other applications, we tried the baking powders the plainest way we could think of, in cream biscuits. Texture wasn't an issue in this denser dough, except for one biscuit that took on a speckled, uneven appearance. (Our science editor explained that the baking powder used in that sample includes potassium bicarbonate, which can cause unwanted browning.) Flavor was more contentious, with 30 percent of tasters noting a metallic flavor in two samples. (Ingredient labels showed that the corresponding products contain aluminum compounds.) This wasn't enough to be off-putting, but tasters preferred options with a clean flavor.

While we didn't find any products that would ruin a baking project, we did find brands that make the difference between a decent cake and a great one.

Our favorite was Argo Double Acting Baking Powder, an inexpensive all-purpose powder that produced tender cakes, soft biscuits, and perfectly chewy cookies.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

ARGO Double Acting Baking Powder
Price: \$1.73 for 12 oz (\$0.14 per oz)
Ingredients: Sodium acid pyrophosphate, sodium bicarbonate, cornstarch, and monocalcium phosphate
Average Cake Height: 1.09 in
Gas Released at Room Temperature: 30%
Gas Released in Oven: 70%



TASTERS' NOTES

This brand performed well in every test we threw at it, making "chewy" cookies, "fluffy" biscuits, and "moist" but "airy" cakes. Its easy-to-use plastic tub helped it edge out the competition.

RECOMMENDED

BOB'S RED MILL Baking Powder
Price: \$3.29 for 16 oz (\$0.21 per oz)
Ingredients: Sodium acid pyrophosphate, sodium bicarbonate, cornstarch, and monocalcium phosphate
Average Cake Height: 1.19 in
Gas Released at Room Temperature: 10%
Gas Released in Oven: 90%



Cakes made with this baking powder were among the tallest and "fluffiest" of the bunch. Biscuits and cookies emerged from the oven "tender" and "airy." Unfortunately, this brand's frustrating plastic-bag packaging got it booted from the top spot.

CALUMET Baking Powder
Price: \$2.49 for 7 oz (\$0.36 per oz)
Ingredients: Baking soda, cornstarch, sodium aluminum sulfate, calcium sulfate, monocalcium phosphate
Average Cake Height: 1.24 in
Gas Released at Room Temperature: Proprietary
Gas Released in Oven: Proprietary



This brand made "taller," "airier," and "more tender" cakes and biscuits than any other brand, but the extra oomph produced cookies that were a little "too cake-y." Some tasters detected a slight "metallic" taste in biscuits.

CLABBER GIRL Baking Powder
Price: \$2.27 for 8.1 oz (\$0.28 per oz)
Ingredients: Cornstarch, sodium bicarbonate, sodium aluminum sulfate, monocalcium phosphate
Average Cake Height: 1.1 in
Gas Released at Room Temperature: 40%
Gas Released in Oven: 60%



"Pillowy" cakes and "tender" cookies earned this brand high marks for texture, but 30 percent of tasters picked up on an off, "metallic" flavor in biscuits from the addition of sodium aluminum sulfate.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

RUMFORD Baking Powder
Price: \$3.47 for 8.1 oz (\$0.43 per oz)
Ingredients: Monocalcium phosphate, sodium bicarbonate, cornstarch (made from non-genetically modified cornstarch)
Average Cake Height: 1.02 in
Gas Released at Room Temperature: 70%
Gas Released in Oven: 30%



This brand, which releases 70 percent of its carbon dioxide at room temperature, made "shallower," "heavier" cake. While not our preferred baking powder for cakes, this product produced "chewy" crinkle cookies and "fluffy" biscuits.

HAIN PURE FOODS Featherweight Baking Powder
Price: \$5.39 for 8 oz (\$0.67 per oz)
Ingredients: Monocalcium phosphate, potato starch, potassium bicarbonate
Average Cake Height: 0.89 in
Gas Released at Room Temperature: 70%
Gas Released in Oven: 30%



This brand uses an atypical combination of ingredients to produce a salt-free and corn-free baking powder, but it comes at a price. While cookies were perfectly "fudgy," cakes were "dense" and biscuits had a "speckled" appearance (but tasted fine).

What's the Difference? Baking Powder versus Baking Soda

Baking soda and baking powder both perform the same job (leavening), but each does it in a different way. **Baking soda** is a single-ingredient product that reacts with acidic ingredients to release carbon dioxide and provide lift. In recipes with a high proportion of acidic ingredients like chocolate, fruit juice, yogurt, or buttermilk, baking soda performs well on its own. **Baking powder** is a mix of baking soda (or another carbon-dioxide producing chemical), a powdered acid such as cream of tartar, and a starch to keep the chemicals dry. When moistened, the powdered acid reacts with the soda, releasing carbon dioxide for lift in recipes without a strong acidic component.



Heirloom Recipe

We're looking for recipes that you treasure—the ones that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more; that always come out for the holidays; that have earned a place at your table and in your heart, through many years of meals. Send us the recipes that spell home to you. Visit CooksCountry.com/magazines/home (or write to Heirloom Recipes, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447); click on Heirloom Recipes and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. **If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*.**



HOT GINGER-SPICED MULLED CIDER

Makes about 1 gallon

"The aroma of simmering cider reminds me of the holidays of my youth." —Karen Ward, Bristol, N.H.

You can find cheesecloth in the baking supply aisle of most grocery stores.

- 1 gallon apple cider
- 2 oranges, sliced ½ inch thick
- 1 lemon, sliced ½ inch thick
- 1 (2-inch) piece ginger, sliced ¼ inch thick
- 2 teaspoons allspice berries
- 6 whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1 cinnamon stick

1. Bring all ingredients to boil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Reduce heat to low and steep for 30 minutes.

2. Line fine-mesh strainer with triple layer of cheesecloth and set over large bowl. Pour mulled cider through prepared strainer and discard solids. Return cider to pot and keep warm over low heat. Serve.

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RC = Recipe Card



FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our winning small food processor, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. To enter, visit CooksCountry.com/rooster by January 31, 2016, or write to Rooster DJ16, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Richard Eisenberg of Glendale, Calif., found the rooster in the August/September 2015 issue on page 12 and won our top-rated water bottle.

WEB EXTRAS

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- Basic Vinaigrette
- Beer-Braised Cabbage
- Broccoli with Sesame-Miso Dressing
- Cake Stand Testing (full story and chart)
- Classic Hummus
- Crisp Parmesan Pork Cutlets
- Garlicky Croutons
- Grill-Braised Short Ribs
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- Herb-Crusted Beef Tenderloin
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- Parmesan-Crusted Asparagus
- Red Velvet Cake Rounds
- Salted Peanut Butter-Pretzel-Chocolate Chip Cookies
- Slow-Cooker Chicken Stock
- S'mores Blossom Cookies

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30-MINUTE SUPPER



PORK CUTLET CUBAN SANDWICH

30-MINUTE SUPPER



PASTA WITH LENTIL-MUSHROOM RAGU

30-MINUTE SUPPER



**CHICKEN THIGHS WITH PANCETTA,
WHITE BEANS, AND ROSEMARY**

30-MINUTE SUPPER



**STEAMED MUSSELS WITH FENNEL,
WHITE WINE, AND TARRAGON**

PASTA WITH LENTIL-MUSHROOM RAGU Serves 4

✓ **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** We use canned lentils instead of dried to make this Neapolitan pasta dish an easy weeknight supper.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 2 large portobello mushroom caps, gills removed, caps cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped fine
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup red wine
- 1 (15-ounce) can lentils, rinsed
- 1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
- 12 ounces ditalini
- 1½ ounces Pecorino Romano cheese, grated (¾ cup)

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add mushrooms, cover, and cook until mushrooms release their liquid, about 5 minutes. Add onion, carrots, ¾ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and remaining 1 tablespoon oil and cook, uncovered, until softened, about 5 minutes. Add wine and cook until almost evaporated, about 2 minutes. Add lentils and tomatoes and their juice; reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until slightly thickened, 5 to 7 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return to pot. Add lentil-mushroom mixture and ½ cup Pecorino and toss to combine. Adjust consistency with reserved cooking water as needed. Serve, sprinkled with remaining ¼ cup Pecorino and drizzled with extra oil.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can substitute another small pasta for ditalini, such as tubettini or elbow macaroni.

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PORK CUTLET CUBAN SANDWICH Serves 4

✓ **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** For a twist on the classic Cuban sandwich, we start by browning a pork cutlet. Then we top it with ham, melted Swiss cheese, pickles, and a tangy orange-mustard sauce.

- 4 (3-ounce) boneless pork cutlets, ¼ inch thick, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- ¾ cup orange juice
- ½ cup dill pickle chips, patted dry and chopped
- 2 tablespoons yellow mustard
- 4 kaiser rolls, split
- 4 thin slices deli Black Forest ham
- 8 thin slices deli Swiss cheese, folded in half
- 1 cup fresh cilantro leaves

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Pat cutlets dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook cutlets until golden brown on both sides and cooked through, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to plate and tent with foil.

2. Add orange juice to now-empty skillet, bring to simmer over medium-high heat, and cook until syrupy, about 5 minutes. Off heat, whisk in pickles and mustard. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Place roll bottoms and tops, cut side up, on prepared sheet. Lay 1 slice ham and 1 slice cheese on each roll bottom. Lay 1 slice cheese on each roll top. Bake until cheese is melted, 3 to 4 minutes. Place 1 cutlet on each roll bottom and divide mustard mixture among sandwiches. Top with cilantro leaves, cover with roll tops, and press to secure. Serve.

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STEAMED MUSSELS WITH FENNEL, WHITE WINE, AND TARRAGON Serves 4

✓ **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** Simmering the broth for a few minutes before adding the mussels allows the fennel to soften and flavor the broth.

- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ cup minced fresh tarragon
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (12-inch) baguette, cut on bias into 12 (1-inch-thick) slices
- 1 fennel bulb, stalks discarded, bulb quartered, cored, and chopped
- 1½ cups dry white wine
- 4 pounds mussels, scrubbed and debearded

1. Adjust oven rack 4 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Combine butter, garlic, 2 tablespoons tarragon, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Spread 5 tablespoons butter mixture on 1 side of baguette slices. Place slices, buttered side up, on rimmed baking sheet.

2. Melt 1 tablespoon butter mixture in Dutch oven over medium heat and cook until garlic is fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add fennel, cover, and cook until softened, about 2 minutes. Stir in wine and ½ teaspoon salt; bring to simmer and cook, uncovered, for 3 minutes. Add mussels to pot, cover, and cook until mussels open, 4 to 6 minutes, stirring twice. Remove pot from heat and transfer mussels to serving bowls using slotted spoon, leaving accumulated mussel broth in pot.

3. Broil baguette slices until lightly browned, about 1 minute per side. Stir remaining 2 tablespoons butter mixture and remaining 2 tablespoons tarragon into broth and season with salt and pepper to taste. Pour broth over mussels and serve with toasted baguette slices.

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CHICKEN THIGHS WITH PANCETTA, WHITE BEANS, AND ROSEMARY Serves 4

✓ **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** Cooking the beans with rendered chicken fat and pancetta gives them bold, meaty flavor.

- 8 (5- to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 2 ounces pancetta, chopped fine
- 5 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 2 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add chicken and cook, skin side down, until well browned, about 7 minutes. Transfer to rimmed baking sheet, skin side up, and roast until chicken registers 175 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet and return to medium heat. Add pancetta, garlic, and rosemary and cook until garlic is golden brown, about 3 minutes. Add beans, broth, and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Bring to simmer and cook until slightly thickened, 5 to 7 minutes. Discard rosemary sprigs and season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Transfer beans to platter and drizzle with extra oil. Top with chicken, sprinkle with parsley, and serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Don't be shy with the olive oil drizzle. Add at least a tablespoon to boost the creaminess of the bean mixture considerably.

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30-MINUTE SUPPER



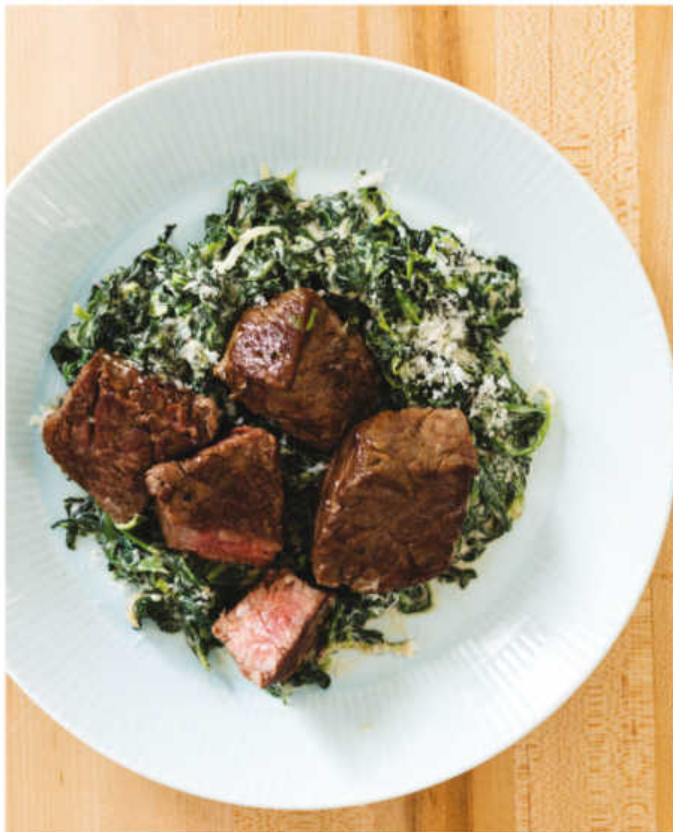
GREEN CURRY CHICKEN WITH GREEN BEANS

30-MINUTE SUPPER



**PAN-FRIED MINUTE STEAKS
WITH CAPER-TOMATO SAUCE**

30-MINUTE SUPPER



SIRLOIN TIPS WITH STEAKHOUSE CREAMED SPINACH


30-MINUTE SUPPER



GARLICKY SKILLET STRATA

PAN-FRIED MINUTE STEAKS WITH CAPER-TOMATO SAUCE

Serves 4

 **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** Dredging the steaks in flour promotes faster browning and gives the sauce a textured surface to cling to.


- 4 (6-ounce) beef cubed steaks
- Salt and pepper
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ¼ cup capers, drained, plus 2 tablespoons caper brine
- 4 garlic cloves, sliced thin
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 ripe large tomatoes (8 ounces each), cored and cut into ½-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

1. Pat steaks dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Place flour in shallow dish. Dredge steaks in flour, shaking off excess. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add 2 steaks to skillet and cook until well browned on first side, about 4 minutes. Flip and cook until browned on second side, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Transfer steaks to platter and tent with foil. Wipe out skillet with paper towels and repeat with remaining 2 tablespoons oil and 2 steaks.

2. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in now-empty skillet over medium heat. Add capers, garlic, and oregano and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and caper brine and cook until tomatoes are softened and heated through, about 1 minute, scraping up any browned bits. Off heat, stir in parsley and remaining 1 tablespoon butter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Pour sauce over steaks. Serve.

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GREEN CURRY CHICKEN WITH GREEN BEANS Serves 4

 **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** Tossing the chicken in cornstarch promotes a crisp, golden-brown crust.

- 3 tablespoons fish sauce
- 2 teaspoons packed brown sugar
- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed and cut crosswise into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 6 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 pound green beans, trimmed and cut into 2-inch lengths
- 2 tablespoons green curry paste
- 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
- 1 (13.5-ounce) can coconut milk
- ¼ cup cilantro leaves


1. Combine 2 tablespoons fish sauce, 2 tablespoons water, and 1 teaspoon sugar in large bowl. Add chicken, toss to coat, and let sit for 5 minutes. Drain chicken and pat dry with paper towels. Place cornstarch in shallow dish. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Dredge chicken in cornstarch, shake off any excess, and add to skillet. Cook until golden brown, about 6 minutes. Transfer to plate and set aside.

2. Add green beans to now-empty skillet and cook over medium-high heat until bright green and blistered, about 5 minutes. Reduce heat to medium, add curry paste and ginger, and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in coconut milk, remaining 1 tablespoon fish sauce, and remaining 1 teaspoon sugar and bring to simmer. Cook until slightly thickened, about 2 minutes. Return chicken and any accumulated juices to skillet and cook until heated through, about 1 minute. Sprinkle with cilantro before serving.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Serve over rice with lime wedges.

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GARLICKY SKILLET STRATA Serves 4

 **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** This quick version of a classic cheese strata is cooked on the stovetop until the eggs are set and then finished in a hot oven to melt and brown the cheese.

- 12 large eggs
- ½ cup half-and-half
- Salt and pepper
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 slices hearty white sandwich bread, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 6 ounces Canadian bacon, chopped
- 4 scallions, white and green parts separated and sliced thin
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 ounces Gruyère cheese, shredded (¾ cup)


1. Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Whisk eggs, half-and-half, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in bowl until well combined, about 30 seconds; set aside.

2. Heat oil in 10-inch oven-safe nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add bread and cook until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Push bread to sides of pan and melt butter in center. Add bacon, scallion whites, and garlic to butter and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds; stir into bread to combine. Add egg mixture and cook, scraping bottom of skillet with rubber spatula, until large curds form, about 2 minutes. Continue to cook, without stirring, for 30 seconds. Sprinkle Gruyère over top.

3. Transfer skillet to oven and bake until surface of strata is slightly puffy and cheese is melted, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove skillet from oven and let stand for 10 minutes. Using spatula, loosen strata from skillet and slide onto platter or cutting board. Sprinkle with scallion greens. Cut into wedges and serve.

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SIRLOIN TIPS WITH STEAKHOUSE CREAMED SPINACH Serves 4

 **WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:** Starting with frozen spinach streamlines the prep for creamed spinach. We skip the heavy cream in favor of a light béchamel flavored with garlic, shallots, and a hint of nutmeg. Sirloin steak tips are often sold as flap meat.

- 1½ pounds sirloin steak tips, trimmed and cut into 2-inch pieces
- Salt and pepper
- 5 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 2 shallots, sliced thin
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1¾ cups whole milk
- 20 ounces frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup)

1. Pat steak tips dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add steak tips and cook until well browned all over and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to plate and tent with foil.

2. Heat remaining 2 teaspoons oil in now-empty skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add shallots and cook until softened, about 2 minutes. Add flour, garlic, and nutmeg and cook until flour is golden and garlic is fragrant, about 30 seconds. Whisk in milk and bring to simmer. Cook, stirring constantly, until thickened, about 3 minutes.

3. Stir in spinach, ¼ cup Parmesan, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook until heated through, about 2 minutes. Transfer to serving bowl and sprinkle with remaining ¼ cup Parmesan. Serve creamed spinach with steak tips.

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THE GREAT AMERICAN CAKE

Red Velvet Cheesecake



This cake boasts velvety layers encasing easy no-bake white chocolate cheesecake filling. Cream cheese frosting and a garnish of festive red crumbs finish the look.

To make this cake, you will need:

- 2 (9-inch) red velvet cake rounds***
- 2 cups (8 ounces) confectioners' sugar**
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened**
- 1½ pounds cream cheese, softened**
- ¾ teaspoon vanilla extract**
- Pinch salt**
- 1½ teaspoons unflavored gelatin**
- 1½ cups heavy cream**
- 6 ounces white chocolate, chopped**
- ½ cup (3½ ounces) granulated sugar**
- White chocolate curls***


FOR THE CAKE: Using serrated knife, split cakes horizontally 1 inch from bottom. Using your fingers, crumble tops into small crumbs; set crumbs aside in airtight container. Set 1 remaining cake round in 9-inch springform pan; reserve second cake round.

FOR THE FROSTING: Using stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat confectioners' sugar and butter on medium-high speed until fluffy, about 2 minutes. Cut 8 ounces cream cheese into 4 pieces and add 1 piece at a time, continuing to beat until incorporated, about 30 seconds. Beat in vanilla and salt. Refrigerate frosting until ready to use.

FOR THE FILLING: Sprinkle gelatin over ½ cup heavy cream in small saucepan and let sit until gelatin softens, about 5 minutes. Cook mixture over low heat until edges are just bubbling. Add white chocolate and continue to cook, stirring constantly, until just melted and smooth. Set aside to cool slightly, about 15 minutes. Using clean stand mixer fitted with whisk, whip remaining 1 cup heavy cream on medium-high speed to soft peaks, 1 to 2 minutes; transfer to medium bowl and set aside. Using now-empty stand mixer fitted with paddle, beat remaining

1 pound cream cheese and granulated sugar on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce speed to medium-low, add white chocolate mixture, and mix until just combined, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Using rubber spatula, gently fold in whipped cream until combined.

TO ASSEMBLE: Spread filling over cake in pan and smooth into even layer. Place remaining cake round, cut side down, on top. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until set, about 6 hours. Run thin knife between cake and sides of pan; remove sides of pan. Transfer cake to cake stand or plate. Spread frosting in even layer over top and sides of cake. Gently press reserved cake crumbs onto sides of cake. Place mound of chocolate curls in center of cake. Serve.

 *Go to [CooksCountry.com](https://www.cookscountry.com) for our Red Velvet Cake Rounds recipe and to see how to make chocolate curls.

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Crab Louis Salad **18**



Gingerbread Whoopie Pies **11**



Southern Smothered Chicken **13**



Chocolate Salami **10**



Garlicky Skillet Strata **RC**



Spicy Cheese Bread **21**



Stuffed Acorn Squash **7**



Microwaved Broccoli **15**



Pork Cutlet Cuban Sandwich **RC**



Apple-Cinnamon Muffins **17**



Five Easy Oatmeal **29**



Sautéed Collards **5**



Chicken and Rice Soup **27**



Cider-Braised Pork Roast **12**